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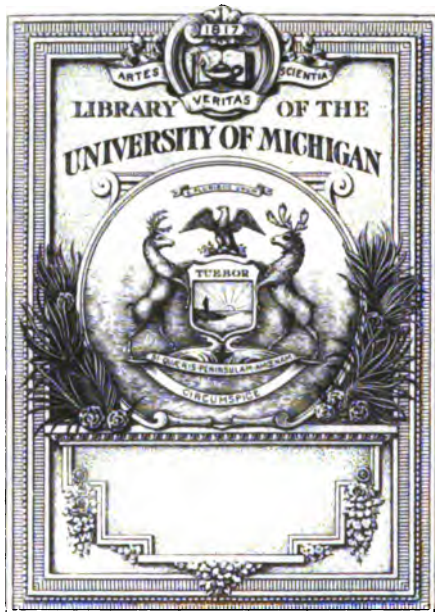
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THE ARGOSY.





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THE ARGOSY.

VOLUME XXIX.

DECEMBER, 1898, TO MARCH, 1899.

NEW YORK :
FRANK A. MUNSEY, PUBLISHER.
111 FIFTH AVENUE.

1899.

Exchange
 Detroit Public Library
 4-9-40

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THE ARGOSY.

VOL. XXIX.

DECEMBER, 1898.

No. 1.

THE FETTERS OF IGNACIO.

BY HENRY HARRISON LEWIS.

A story of the Philippine Islands—An American's experience in a region supposed to be uninhabited—The tortures of Tantalus and some unexpected features of an insurrection.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.—THE ARRIVAL ON AN UNKNOWN SHORE.

AS a particularly big wave bore him far aloft, he looked eagerly towards the suggestive dark line on the tossing horizon and sputtered out:

"I hope I may get there before sundown, any way, for I should die easier if I knew that I had seen a bit of the country."

Then the wave slid grandly from under him, and in the deep trough he saw neither sign of land nor of the vessel from which he had taken involuntary departure a few hours before. Nothing greeted his eyes save the ruffled surface of deep green walls of water that rose and fell on all sides.

Kenneth Crenshawe left New York early in January, 1898, the sole passenger on the sailing ship *Grand Republic*. His purpose in taking this long journey was simply travel, and the reason for selecting a sailing ship was his intense love of the sea. In the situation in which we find him, it was of mighty little consequence to him that a very considerable fortune stood in his name.

All had gone well enough with the *Grand Republic* for many weeks after she set sail. There had been the usual quota of rough weather, and a moderately extended period of calm, but all in all the voyage had been as agreeable as either the passenger or the captain, who was interested in the cargo, could wish. They were approaching the China Sea, aiming for Hong Kong, when the winds blew up from the north, tore the ocean into great waves, and drove the ship rapidly from her course.

There is no good reason why we should pause to describe the gallant struggle that men and ship made against that furious storm. It resulted, as such events sometimes do, in the complete wreck of the vessel.

It was days before the ship yielded to the sea, and when at last it gave way the sun was just rising. The captain had given up hope and had ordered the

men to take to such boats as had not already been washed away or hopelessly stove.

One boat had been successfully launched, only to be overturned before it had gone a hundred yards from the ship. Apparently the same wave that did for the small boat completed destruction upon the Grand Republic, for all on board were washed off. Crenshawe had not been in the small boat, and when he was lifted from the deck of the ship he had nothing, not even so much as a block of wood, to which he might pin hope.

Partly through good fortune, and partly through his own endeavors, he came up with a small bit of wreckage, to which he clung for hours. The ship was a long time in going down, and as Crenshawe drifted, or was driven, further away, he kept turning his head as the waves lifted him, to watch the progress of the wreck.

It was as if his home lay there, and as if some kindness of fortune might restore it to him. All hope could not be given up until the last sign of the once stanch vessel had disappeared.

During the first part of his experience in the waves he could see other men making a similar struggle, but one after another these dropped from view. At first, too, there had been other bits of wreckage tossing in his vicinity, but at last these were swept elsewhere, and he was left alone.

When the waves lifted him and he glanced northward he could see the remnant of the Grand Republic barely visible upon the surface of the sea.

It was long after midday when, on rising to the top of a wave, he allowed his glance to wander southward, and discovered a dark streak upon the horizon that indicated the near presence of land. Immediately Crenshawe, whose courage it is hardly needful to say had been waning, revived. Land of any kind was a welcome sight. He had never been in this part of the world before, but having read much about it, he knew that this land must be a part of the great Philippine Archipelago.

He knew further that the most northern group of small islands, known as the Babuyan, was composed wholly of uninhabited territory. In all probability this land that was dimly visible to the south, was one of these unpeopled islands, but it was land, and with all his fondness for the sea Crenshawe felt that nothing could be more lovely at that time than a barren coral reef, or a waste sand bar, provided only that it had a square rod of dry soil upon it.

From that time he endeavored to speed himself toward that distant, vague line. An expert swimmer, he might, under fair conditions, have navigated the sea unaided by the wreckage, or, rather, unimpeded by it, for clinging to it as he did, he could not make so much progress swimming as he could have done without it. Nevertheless, he hung to it, for, with that land miles away, this little fragment of a plank seemed to him the one possible link that bound him to life.

Left to the mercy of the wind alone he would have floated to the island in time, but the sun was nearing the western horizon, his endurance was beginning to ebb, and he felt at times a great sinking of doubt as to whether he could hold his vital forces together until his feet felt the ground beneath them.

So now, as he rose to the top of the succeeding waves, he looked no longer

to the north for a possible view of the Grand Republic, but strained his eyes ever southward to the land. It must have been that currents as well as the wind and the general trend of the storm helped him, for he was agreeably surprised to see the land draw rapidly nearer. Still, the sun was descending with unparalleled rapidity, and he had an odd horror of being thrown upon that shore in darkness.

At last, above the seething of the waves, he could distinguish a rumble from the direction of the land, which he promptly recognized as the roar of breakers. Then his anxious thoughts took a new turn.

A good many tons of water can be encompassed in surf ten feet high, and these waves, rolling unimpeded thus far toward the island, were likely to produce a surf far in excess of that. Crenshawe's greatest danger lay in being caught beneath a breaker.

But he held on and kept up unremitting struggles until at length he could see the clouds of white foam rising and obscuring the low shore line. Not altogether low was that shore line. Directly in front there seemed to be a broad beach, leading back to a plain flanked by hills, but at his right hand a spur of these hills apparently led straight down to the sea, for now and again he could observe a much higher cloud of spray leaping into the air against what looked like a granite ledge.

Luck was with him then to the extent that he was being driven towards the beach, rather than against the cliff.

And now the waves seemed to grow suddenly higher than before. As he sank rhythmically into each succeeding trough, it seemed as if he were being shot down to a bottomless abyss.

More than once he caught his breath with a gasp, fearing that by some strange accident his feet would touch the bottom, and the next wave would break on top of him. He was spared this calamity. The semblance of increasing height and depth was due to the fact that he was now approaching land and gradually riding over the shelving beach. The noise of the breakers had now become a terrific roar. Crenshawe began to measure the waves between himself and the breaking line. Five—four—three—now he must look sharp. The irregular pulsation of the ocean might cause this very wave upon which he was now rising to break before its time.

He held his breath as he came to the summit and exerted himself to swim in opposition to the onward rush of the wave, fearing to get carried too far forward. The effort seemed vain. The mighty muscles of the ocean far outbalanced his own feeble efforts.

The wave carried him on and on, until the surf line seemed to be directly beneath him. Then, suddenly, it fell, and he sank gasping and quivering to the trough.

Despairingly he turned his head away from land. A huge green wall of water was rushing upon him, its top already crinkling with the coming break. Fate, then, had saved him merely to dash his last hope and life out together!

But for a man like Crenshawe, the last hope has not gone while life lasts. With him the two went hand in hand, and if either were to give way first, it would be life. Dying he would still hope, and hoping, he would struggle.

Crenshawe gave the towering billow one hateful glance, and then dived straight into it, swimming with all his exhausted energy out to sea. In an instant, by reason of the height of the waves, he was many feet under water. Even there the dull roaring of the surf dinned in his ears and seemed to howl a song of triumph over his discomfiture.

The force of the wave bore him landward in spite of his efforts to go toward the sea. He found himself thrown suddenly over upon his back, and rising by his own buoyancy, he was presently at the summit of the billow.

The din of the breakers increased a thousand fold, for now he was not only listening to them, but he was of them. Instead of green water around him, all was milk white foam. The wave had broken not over his head, but just beneath him, and with a mighty tumult and infinite force, it was rushing up the shelving beach and carrying the castaway with it.

Another instant and he was pitched headlong from the summit of a lesser wave that had formed after the first one broke. He struck on hands and knees in slipping sand, overwhelmed with the surf of smaller waves that merely mocked the terrible breakers just behind him.

Blinded with foam, half dazed with the shock of his fall, Crenshawe staggered to his feet and made all possible haste up the beach. The wave had done its work in one direction, but now, despoiled of its prey, it began to drag him back furiously. The water was waist high, and beneath his feet the sands seemed to run with it.

One slip, one instant's failure to remain upright, and he would have been caught by that fierce undertow and carried back just in time to be crushed by a thousand tons of water breaking from the next wave.

Crenshawe did not make that slip. He felt the land, uneasy though it was, beneath his feet, and on he struggled, until the receding wave left him with no more than a mere splash upon the sands.

Just then the sun sank below the horizon and a tropical evening hurried darkness upon land and castaway.

"I will see the country, any way," Crenshawe gasped, as he staggered on beyond high water mark and fell exhausted.

CHAPTER II.—COMPANIONS OF THE CAVERN.

AFTER a brief moment Crenshawe rose. He wrung some of the water from his dripping garments and then took a comprehensive glance at the landscape.

The beach proper was perhaps a hundred yards wide. At the top was a line of dense, low growing foliage that was just high enough to obscure a glimpse of the hills beyond.

The most conspicuous object that met his gaze was the spur of these hills that formed a cliff on the shore. It was distant not more than a quarter of a mile. The rock was evidently of the most rugged description, rent in great fissures and piled up in irregular heaps after the manner of all rocky coasts subject to the direct action of the waves. Barren as the cliff was, it yet appeared to be the most promising subject for exploration, or if nothing more

were to be gained from it, a view of the outlying land might be obtained from its summit. Therefore, Crenshawe directed his steps toward it.

The waves were constantly washing up bits of wood, whether wreckage from the Grand Republic or some other vessel, he could not determine. Crenshawe picked up a stick three or four feet long, and with this as his only weapon, his explorations of the island began.

As he approached the cliff, its black sides revealed openings in great variety and number. Some were merely fissures caused by portions of the ledge dropping away from the main body; others evidently enough were caverns of considerable extent.

At the point where Crenshawe had come to the base of the cliff there seemed to be no possible way of climbing to the summit. He did not give up without a brief trial, and with considerable difficulty he mounted perhaps twenty feet. Then there was above him a sheer wall of rock, with no projections sufficiently large to be gripped with the fingers, to say nothing of furnishing a footing ground.

Worse yet, although he had climbed to a height far above the level of the land, the cliff itself prevented him from taking any view of it. He could see nothing but the blank wall of rock in one direction, and, by twisting his neck at the imminent risk of losing his hold, the sea in the other, and long before this the sea had lost its interest in his eyes as a spectacle. Grumbling a bit at his disappointment, Crenshawe descended. Darkness was coming on so fast that during even this short excursion up the cliff, the light had failed marvelously. It was now difficult to distinguish between the white sand of the beach and the rank foliage that grew on its border. Nevertheless, Crenshawe went up to the point where vegetation began, with the hopeless idea of getting at least one glimpse of the territory that might be suggestive as to ways and means of prolonging his existence.

He saw nothing that gave him immediate suggestion or hope. For the most part the bushes grew higher than his head, and what little glimpse he had, revealed a broad expanse of flat land, and the dim outline of hills far to the south. A long drawn howl from somewhere in the direction of those hills smote weirdly upon his ears and caused his blood to chill.

There was no mistaking its import. It was not a human cry, and what manner of wild beasts might inhabit this domain was a problem to Crenshawe and one which he was by no means anxious to solve at once.

He retreated to the beach once more and took another look around. The cliff was blacker and more repelling than before; but nothing was more inhospitable than the sea, unless it be this great plain inhabited by howling beasts. As compared with these, the cliff with its yawning caverns seemed positively inviting.

What with the coming clouds, and the night, and the possibility of encounter with wild animals, Crenshawe was irresistibly drawn to seek any form of shelter that offered itself. A few paces in front of him was the opening of a cavern. It was well above high water mark, and although its black interior might conceal a thousand perils, it seemed to be the best refuge that the situation afforded.

Gripping his stick more firmly, he made his way to the mouth of the cave and entered. At this point the opening was hardly more than seven feet from top to bottom. Two paces from the entrance and Crenshawe was in absolute blackness.

He dared not walk for fear of stepping into a fissure. But he deemed it necessary to make an examination of the place before trusting himself to it for the night. So he pushed his feet cautiously forward an inch at a time, and meanwhile beat the air about him with his stick. Thus waving it, he observed that the end touched the walls of the cavern on each side.

In this way he had made, perhaps, a distance of a dozen feet into the heart of the cliff, when of a sudden his blood seemed to freeze. The stick had struck a yielding obstruction directly in front of him, and at the same instant there was a whirring and flapping noise wholly incomprehensible, but for that very reason blood curdling.

A whole army of—something—seemed to have been stirred up by his meddlesome stick. The rustling, fluttering, flapping, whirring sounds in front suggested the rattling hum of a factory, and of a sudden there was a whiff of air upon his cheeks, something grazed them, and through the blackness of the cavern this something rushed past to the entrance.

With a gasp of horror, Crenshawe turned to retreat. He had no mind for fighting these invisible nondescripts.

The light of day had not wholly departed, and the mouth of the cavern was therefore like a window looking out upon the sea. Across its comparatively bright plane, the something that had brushed him passed, and it was so clearly silhouetted there that he saw what it was, although his knowledge would not have been equal to giving it its proper name.

It had wings fully three feet from tip to tip, and it had claws, and its body was slender, out of all proportion to the comparatively immense expanse of its pinions. Even as he looked another and still another of these strange inhabitants of the cavern flew past him, one of them brushing his shoulder in its flight.

Sure of his ground, now that he had traversed it, Crenshawe made for the entrance quickly, and just as he came there one of these strange flying things wheeled about and came directly toward him. He saw its black, beady eyes and its outstretched claws.

Crenshawe had read of vampires, but had always supposed that they were fabulous creatures, and here he was attacked by a veritable specimen.

Impelled more by acknowledged fright and horror than by courage, the castaway struck the thing with his stick. The blow caught the bird full upon the head, and it dropped with a staggering motion to his feet.

At a little distance he saw the two other creatures that had fled past him, flapping their way awkwardly about in the darkness, diving this way and that with the irregular motion that suggested some horrible form of intoxication. They did not seem disposed to attack him, and he turned his attention to the one he had struck down.

It was still quivering at his feet, and with a sickening horror at the sight of it, Crenshawe gave it another blow.

That settled it, and his mind was now relieved from any sense of real danger in the presence of these creatures. But he had no mind for continuing to make his lodging with them. He started away from the cliff, and then became aware for the first time that he was under the observation of a human being.

He was small, this newcomer, and even in the darkness it was clear that his skin was black. What little clothing he had was not of a fashionable cut, and it bore no suggestion of civilized garments.

The fellow was standing still, but when he saw that Crenshawe looked toward him, he came forward. His stature suggested that he might be one of a race of dwarfs, but when he spoke his voice had the high pitch of immaturity.

"Big bat," he said, pointing a dusky finger at the dead vampire. He grinned as he spoke, and it seemed to Crenshawe that there was a hospitable welcome in his expression.

CHAPTER III.—THE ISLE OF NIGHT.

"Is that what you call it?" exclaimed Crenshawe. And then, overcome with a sense of wonderment, he added: "So you speak English?"

"Little bit," the boy replied.

"Do you know what place this is?"

The boy grinned broadly and answered, "The Isle of Night."

"Isle of Night?" repeated Crenshawe. "That's appropriate enough for the moment, and it'll do as well as any other name, I guess. Do you live here?"

The boy nodded.

"Any other people live here?"

"Lots," said the boy.

"Now this is interesting," exclaimed Crenshawe. "Here I have been cast up by the waves on what, according to geography and human knowledge generally, should be an uninhabited island, and I am met by a gentleman who seems to have a kindly feeling for me, and who addresses me, somewhat imperfectly to be sure, but, nevertheless, unmistakably in my native tongue. That, young man, is a speech addressed to the world at large. I have no idea that you understand it. But permit me to assure you that there is nothing offensive in it."

"All right," the boy declared, once more contorting his face into an expansive grin.

"What is your name?" asked Crenshawe abruptly.

"Tony."

"Anything else?"

Tony shook his black head in silence.

"Well then, Tony," went on Crenshawe, "I've got something to say to you, and this time I'll try to make my speech so simple that you can understand it all. Hungry. Understand? Wet, soaked through. See? Tired out, swimming through the sea. Big storm. Heap wind. Shipwreck. Catch on?"

Crenshawe illustrated his remarks by a variety of expressive gestures, tapping his stomach at the word hungry, thrashing his arms about to suggest swimming, and meantime grimacing to the best of his ability.

Tony evidently understood it all, for he nodded sympathetically from time to time, and at the end he drew from the scanty concealment of his apology for clothing a fragment of rice cake, which he handed to the castaway.

"Tony," cried Crenshawe, "I felt that you were a gentleman the moment I set eyes on you. Pardon the question. I am not suspicious, but simply consumed with Yankee curiosity—what is the nature of this article?"

Tony stared.

"Excuse me," said Crenshawe. "I mean what is it? What is it made of?"

"Rice," answered Tony at once. "Very good. You eat. No poison."

"Great Scott!" Crenshawe exclaimed, "to what extent civilization must have gone with this undeveloped gentleman that he should not only understand the word poison, but grasp the possibility of my suspecting that he might be playing a foul trick upon me! It's all right, Tony; I'm simply making remarks to the world at large again. That I have perfect confidence in you, you will now observe. I never could bear the taste of rice, but——"

Crenshawe's further remarks were impeded by the filling of his mouth with a large section of the cake. It was perfectly true that up to that time he never had been able to eat rice with a relish, if at all. But nothing had ever tasted better to him than this crude cake, and it made such a good impression upon his palate that he was thereafter able to feed upon rice without dislike, and, on the contrary, with absolute satisfaction.

This was exceedingly fortunate, as he had grievous occasion to learn, but at this moment the wildest stretch of imagination would not have enabled him to foresee that this favorable introduction to a rice diet could be of more than immediate use to him.

"Now, then, Tony," said the castaway, when he had finished the cake, "you have made such an agreeable impression on me that I shall be delighted to come in contact with other members of your community, taking it for granted, of course, that they are all as cultivated and hospitable as your respected self. I shall be pleased to intrench upon the hospitality of your people to the extent of a lodging for the night, and, perhaps, a breakfast in the morning. In other words, Tony, my friend, where do you live?"

The black listened with mouth agape while Crenshawe was working off his incomprehensible eloquence, but the moment the castaway descended to ordinary language his eyes lit up with pleasure, and he now responded by pointing inland and uttering the single word, "There."

"How far?" asked Crenshawe. "One mile, two mile, three mile?"

Tony held up two fingers.

"Clear as a book," cried Crenshawe; "lead on."

Tony promptly turned about and walked along the beach in a direction that took them away from the cliff. Presently he turned inland and entered the thick growth of bushes by means of a narrow path that Crenshawe had not discovered, although it was near the spot where he had been thrown on shore.

The full darkness of night had now come on, and the presence of a path could not be known by the eye. But that there was a trail was clear enough to the feet, for there was no tripping on vines or other obstructions.

"I say, Tony," remarked Crenshawe after they had gone on a little way, "what are your people called?"

"My people?" repeated the boy hesitatingly.

"Yes; who are they? What is their name?"

"Oh," said Tony, thinking that he understood. "He is Don Ignacio."

The answer was as satisfactory to Crenshawe as if his question had been fully comprehended. He had expected Tony to give him the name of a barbarous tribe, which would have informed him but little concerning the island and its inhabitants, and the question had been put more for the purpose of drawing the little fellow into a conversation than anything else.

The answer was immensely suggestive. Don Ignacio. That could mean a good many things, perhaps, but certainly it implied that the chief man of the island was a Spaniard of some pretension in the social scale.

"Perhaps," thought Crenshawe, "I have been mistaken in my supposition that this was one of that uninhabited group of islands north of Luzon. More likely this is one of the minor islands where the Spanish have a colony, and probably Don Ignacio will prove to be the vice governor, or the resident representative of Spanish rule, whatever his title may be. He will be a white man anyhow, probably educated enough to speak English, and, in any case, I shall soon be on my way again to Hong Kong, unless I find it agreeable to stay here a bit."

Confident thoughts these. They were natural enough under the circumstances. Crenshawe could have no doubt that any civilized man would treat him hospitably and go to considerable pains to speed him pleasantly on his way.

In truth, he was destined to stay on a bit in the Isle of Night, but his sojourn was to be far from the kind he expected and far from his own choosing.

His thoughts on the matter coursed rapidly through his brain, so that there was but the briefest pause between Tony's mention of Don Ignacio and this remark:

"He sent for you."

"What?" exclaimed Crenshawe, in genuine amazement. "Don Ignacio sent for me? How did he know that I was here?"

"He knows everything," replied Tony gravely.

"Well," muttered Crenshawe, "this beats even my reception by this dark complexioned young gentleman. Will wonders never cease? I thought that it was strange enough to see a human being in the first place, and then to have him speak to me in English, and now he calmly declares that the chief man of the place sent him to find me. I presume there is some mistake about it. The Don probably is expecting the arrival of somebody else, and this young man has mistaken me for the other fellow. It doesn't matter anyway. I have fallen among civilized people, and so am in no danger of such hospitable treatment as cannibals might give."

Cannibals might be preferred, Mr. Crenshawe. Savages who resort to

the eating of human flesh may be cajoled or browbeaten into submission. There are many avenues of escape from barbarous human beings whose level of intelligence is low. But from Don Ignacio——

"It's very kind of Don Ignacio, I'm sure," said Crenshawe aloud. "I shall be pleased to meet him."

The boy made no reply, and from that time they trudged on in silence.

Presently, in spite of the darkness, Crenshawe realized that they had come to cultivated ground. There was no longer any bushes to brush against them as they passed; the earth had that softness beneath their feet that comes from harrowing, and its generally level character suggested its use for tillage.

A little further on and a light gleamed through the darkness. At first Crenshawe believed that it was from a window, but it proved to be a lantern. Tony gave a shrill whistle as soon as it was in view, and the light moved toward them.

A moment later and it was directly in front, held by a full grown man clad much as Tony was. He was a black, and he looked at Crenshawe with dull, indifferent eyes.

Standing just behind him, however, was another man whose appearance at first glance justified all the castaway's hopes. He was of medium stature, clad in white linen, with a broad palm hat upon his head, and a fan in his hand.

His face, darkened by twenty years' exposure to the southern sun, was hardly lighter than that of his lantern bearer, but there was the ruddy tinge upon his cheeks and the straightness of feature that were the sure indications of Caucasian blood. He was looking at Crenshawe with eyes full of curious interest, and the castaway could not doubt that this was Don Ignacio.

CHAPTER IV.—THE DON'S HOSPITALITY.

THE Don apparently was a man of middle age, although his smooth shaven face betrayed few wrinkles, and the little hair that was visible beneath his hat was coal black. Crenshawe smiled the moment he beheld this man, and the American's lips parted to give expression to some of his irrepressible buoyancy, but no words came forth, and the smile died upon his lips, while something very like a presentiment of impending trouble chilled his heart.

Eyes may sometimes lie, and Crenshawe devoutly hoped that the suggestion of malignancy in Don Ignacio's glance was not a true forecast of his disposition.

The Don continued to look at the castaway for a moment, and then said something, presumably in Spanish. At all events, Crenshawe did not understand it. At the sound of the words, however, his spirits revived, for in the Don's accent there was that combination of smoothness and incisiveness that distinguishes the civilized man from the savage.

The light hearted American's momentary depression vanished, and he felt ashamed that his heart had been clouded by presentiment even for an instant. So it was with characteristic, easy assurance that he responded:

"Non comprenny, versteh'? No sabbe, mushoo, or perhaps you're called seenyor, mister?"

Crenshawe's versatility in languages was only limited by his knowledge of them. The Don evidently saw no humor in the polyglot reply. He stared coldly, and then muttered "Americano."

"Yes, sir," said Crenshawe—"Brooklyn, United States. Brooklyn still, although its identity is largely swallowed up in Greater New York."

This also appeared to make no impression upon the Don. He stood stock still, continuing to stare at the castaway, and Crenshawe was hard put to it to know what he should say next.

He could not fail to be impressed with the fact that this reception was hardly what one civilized man should give another who had evidently suffered shipwreck. Evidently, for the light of the lantern plainly revealed the American's soaked clothing and his lack of a hat.

Furthermore, it would almost pass without saying that a stranger appearing in this way on the island had come there through misfortune that demanded sympathy.

During the pause that ensued, Crenshawe glanced about him. He observed that the lantern bearer stood subserviently still, without even a glance at the stranger. His black face had even more than the usual dull indifference of the savage. Little Tony, however, appeared to be mildly interested, for he looked from Don Ignacio to Crenshawe with a grin upon his face.

Apparently they stood at the beginning of some kind of orchard. What lay beyond Crenshawe could not make out, although more than once he thought he detected a gleam of light as from a house window, or from a lantern. Presently the Don said:

"You have been wrecked."

Delighted to hear the English language plainly spoken, Crenshawe again felt a great sense of relief, and his discomfiting fears fled precipitately.

"Yes," he exclaimed eagerly. "My ship could not stand the furious storm that has been raging for a week or so, and foundered early this morning. The wind and currents drove me in this direction, and when I caught sight of the land I helped myself towards it as well as I could. I thought a good many times that I should never get here."

The Don grunted inarticulately, as if the information was of no interest to him, and asked:

"What was the name of your ship?"

"The Grand Republic."

"What port did she hail from?"

"New York."

"And what date?"

"January 8th."

"Where was she bound?"

"Hong Kong."

The questions were put coldly, much as if the Don were a police justice examining a candidate charged with vagrancy. Crenshawe answered with much the same directness, while he tried to study this strange man, hoping to find some means of reaching his heart and so provoking a sympathy that evidently was not easily awakened.

"Are you the only one who escaped?" asked the Don.

"I think so. I saw one boatload of men capsize, and one after the other the poor fellows disappeared. It is possible that others than myself reached the shore or are still afloat——"

"No matter," interrupted the Don. "I saw the wreck. I was watching with a telescope."

"Ah," cried Crenshawe, "then that accounts for this lad's remark. I understand it now. He said you had sent for me, and that means that you had ordered an exploration of the beach in order to succor any possible survivors of the disaster. You have done me a great service, sir, for I supposed I had come upon an uninhabited island, and before I found your town I might have perished from starvation."

Again the Don grunted unintelligibly.

"You are not a sailor," he said.

"No, sir; I was a passenger."

"Were there other passengers?"

"I was the only one."

"Then you have money."

Crenshawe smiled.

"Not to any considerable extent about me, sir," he answered good humoredly. "When the storm became serious I did what I could to help the crew save the vessel. Naturally I had no more than a little change in my pockets at the time, and when the final disaster came it was so sudden that I could not return to my cabin to get my papers. I had a letter of credit, which would have served me well in Hong Kong, or any other city where there is an American or English bank. The letter has gone to the bottom of the Pacific, but the credit still exists, and once in Hong Kong, or in any other banking community, I have no doubt that I shall be able to establish my identity and claim my funds."

The Don was evidently thoughtful. Possibly this story interested him more than the castaway's misfortunes. Crenshawe remembered that he had read much of Spanish greed, and immediately he sought to play upon it.

"Of course, you'll have to take my word for it at present," he said, "but if you care to accord me shelter and sustenance until I can communicate with Hong Kong I shall doubtless be able to place in your hands more than sufficient money to compensate you for your trouble."

"It makes no difference," said the Don shortly. Then he turned to Tony, and having said something in Spanish, wheeled about and stalked away, preceded by the lantern bearer.

Naturally enough Crenshawe was considerably surprised. Whether his play upon Spanish greed had succeeded, or not, he could not guess. Literally interpreted, the Don's remark that it "made no difference" would imply that he was ready to accord hospitality to an unfortunate stranger without thought of pecuniary consideration.

On the other hand, the man's tone and accent precluded this literal interpretation of his words. It suggested something behind the remark that could only be fathomed by experience. And thus Crenshawe found it.

"Come," said Tony, starting along after the Don.

"I guess it's all right," thought Crenshawe, following. "The Don's manners are not exactly of the effusive kind, but that's his peculiarity. Doubtless he means well. I know what I would do if I were in his place, and as he is a white man I don't believe he can do any less. The probability is that I shall sit down presently to a bountiful dinner in the governor's palace, if that is what he calls his outfit, and then be conducted to a spacious chamber, where I shall pass the first night in many weeks in a genuine bed."

If Tony was conducting him to the governor's palace, the governor himself apparently was not bound there, for presently the lad turned sharply to the right, leaving the lantern bearer and the Don going in another direction.

They walked perhaps ten minutes through an orchard, the nature of which Crenshawe could not make out in the darkness, and paused at length before a building that appeared to be little more than a hut. It had a thatched roof and something that seemed to answer for a window. It was too dark to notice other features clearly, and moreover Tony gave no time for an examination. He pushed open the door, and partly entering, pointed inside.

"There," he said; "sleep."

Crenshawe was disappointed. It was doubtless not altogether reasonable that he should be so, for only a few hours before it had been his earnest desire to reach bare ground. When he was battling with the waves he did not indulge in the luxurious hope of a man made shelter, and when at length he found himself on dry soil he would have been amply content if he had been accorded the crude hospitality of a savage.

But just as all men's desires grow upon what they feed, he had speedily made up his mind to such civilized accommodations and bountiful hospitality as he himself would have accorded to any wayfarer in distress. And it went against the grain to find that the white man in authority over the island had coolly assigned him to this rude hut.

"Perhaps there is something in the circumstances I don't understand yet," he reflected, "and I might as well be philosophical. I sha'n't be rained on here, and I sha'n't be in danger from attacks from wild beasts. I'll have another chat with the Spanish governor tomorrow, and if I am not greatly mistaken, I will bring him to a more agreeable frame of mind."

Accordingly, hopeful as ever, quickly surmounting disappointments, and ever inclined to make the best of his situation, Crenshawe entered the hut. It was so dark there that he paused just beyond the threshold, and Tony came in to lead him.

Taking the American by the hand, the black boy conducted him across the one room, and then, stooping, showed him that there was a rude bed there, apparently something like a shakedown of boughs. Then Tony said good night and departed.

Wondering more and more, Crenshawe stretched himself upon the bed, where speedily his surprise gave way to fatigue, and he slept like a log until he was awakened by a hand upon his shoulder. It was daylight. Looking sleepily up and hardly conscious of his whereabouts, Crenshawe recognized Tony.

"Time to get up and work," the boy said. "Eat," and he held out a rice cake.

"Ah," said Crenshawe cheerfully, "Don Ignacio means to have me saw wood for my lodging and breakfast, does he? Well, I guess I can do that if he prefers labor in payment to good American money."

Then he ate the rice cake, while Tony stood by eying him with that pleased smile of his.

Crenshawe said nothing during the meal, for he was a little weary of parading his bombastic speeches for the benefit of the ignorant lad, and, moreover, he was thinking of the Don and planning how he should approach him. Just as he had swallowed the last morsel, a man appeared in the doorway of the hut. He was a Spaniard, and if ever a man had an evil face, he was the one.

"Come," he said roughly, in imperfect English, "we can't wait forever."

Crenshawe stood up at once. "What do you want?" he asked.

"Fall in," replied the man, pointing outside.

Crenshawe went to the doorway, and saw a line of half clad black men standing in front of the hut. Not one of them looked at him. Their dull, indifferent faces were turned aside, and they stood there as if they were so many cattle waiting for the driver's command.

Crenshawe turned inquiringly to the man who had addressed him.

"Get in at the end of the line," the man said harshly, "and don't waste any time about it."

CHAPTER V.—COMPULSION.

FOR just an instant Crenshawe stood stock still. The capacity of the Isle of Night for supplying surprises seemed to be unlimited. He was profoundly puzzled. What could be the precise significance of this waiting line of black men and the surly commands of the white who seemed to be their boss, he could not make out, for it was naturally slow in dawning upon him that he himself was expected to do any serious work.

Nevertheless, it was that word as uttered by young Tony that led him to a decision. Although circumstances had heretofore relieved him from the necessity of working for a living, he had never felt himself above labor, but, on the contrary, had cherished a very healthy respect for it. Moreover, he was quick to realize in his present situation that he could hardly choose his course.

Thrown thus upon the hospitality of a stranger, he was bound as a gentleman to accord as far as possible with that stranger's views. Therefore it was that he decided, with characteristic good humor, to accept the situation so far as he could then see it, and learn at least what was required of him.

The pause that had ensued while he brought himself around to this attitude was so brief that the surly white hardly noticed it. Crenshawe stepped to the end of the waiting line, remarking as he did so:

"Your language may be in accordance with the custom of this place, but your manners are unnecessarily offensive."

As he did not deign to look in the direction of the white man while speaking, Crenshawe failed to notice the malignant smile which came upon his face. The man made no reply to him, but said something in a loud voice, in response to which the line of blacks began to move.

They did not walk with anything like military precision, although they kept their formation and advanced in single file until they came to the orchard through which Crenshawe had been conducted by Tony on the previous evening.

Meantime the American was looking about him. He saw that the hut he had occupied was one of several similar structures near by, and off to one side and at a considerable distance there was a mass of foliage that looked as if it might be flowering shrubs set out in a garden. Seen anywhere else it would have suggested a private park, and this appearance was further enhanced by just a glimpse of a roof over one of the lower trees.

Between himself and the spot where the foliage grew with such regularity and beauty, stretched level ground that for the most part was undeveloped. One comparatively small section, apparently, was devoted to the raising of vegetables. A half dozen blacks at the moment were engaged there pulling weeds.

Arrived at the orchard, Crenshawe looked curiously at the trees: He had never seen anything like them. They were very straight, from twenty to thirty feet in height, with trunks from six to eight inches in diameter. His eyes searched their branches vainly for any sign of fruit.

This proved to be the place where the men were to work. Without waiting for a command the blacks separated as soon as they were among the trees, and one of them, stooping, applied a knife to the trunk of a tree close beside the ground. Crenshawe watched him with growing curiosity.

The knife was a very commonplace implement, not so large as an ordinary carving knife, and apparently not constructed for heavy work. Nevertheless, with this the black man cut clear through the trunk of the tree, and presently two or three other blacks took hold of it and pulled it over.

"Well," thought Crenshawe, "that is the funniest kind of wood I have ever seen. It seems hardly more than a gigantic weed."

Other blacks were attacking other trees in the orchard in the same way, until presently a half dozen had been felled. They were dragged to the edge of the orchard and laid side by side. Then some of the blacks brought up implements that looked like huge pincers. The handles were seven or eight feet long.

Up to this time Crenshawe had looked on idly. The white boss of the gang had busied himself in running from one to another group of blacks, evidently directing them in their work, although not once did any of the black men respond to him. They toiled away in silence much as if they were machines and understood no word that the boss said to them.

The first of the big pincers had been put in place. Its jaws were clamped securely on the trunk of a felled tree, and a couple of blacks prepared to use their knives at the severed end of the trunk. Then the white man turned to Crenshawe, and, his eyes gleaming malignantly, said:

"Sit on the end of that lever."

Crenshawe looked at the man for a moment without replying, and then said coolly:

"Are you speaking to me?"

"Yes, I am," snarled the boss viciously. "You get on that lever and hold it down. It's the easiest work you'll have to do here, but you want to learn right now that we don't waste any time in giving orders twice. You hear?"

"Yes," said Crenshawe, folding his arms, "I hear."

His resolution was taken. During the short speech of the boss Crenshawe's thoughts had gone through another tumultuous crisis. It was a strange experience for him, and so it would have been for any man brought up in anything like his circumstances.

The full meaning of the situation was as yet unsuspected by him, but one point in it was tolerably clear. He was to be compelled to work. Willingly would he have toiled and gratefully, too, in compensation for food and shelter, for his mind was yet keenly sensitive of recent perils, and he realized fully the distress from which this situation offered an escape. Working for a living was certainly better than starving to death, but to work under compulsion was another thing.

If Don Ignacio had suggested that he needed another laborer upon the estate, Crenshawe would have been glad to pitch in and work for all he was worth, regarding the episode as one of the adventures incident to his travels. Don Ignacio had not seen fit to make a suggestion, but, on the other hand, had sent this bully to him with orders, and without so much as an apology had directed him to toil with these ignorant blacks.

And there was really the most important sticking point. Crenshawe had grown up in an atmosphere of political freedom. To him, theoretically at all events, all men were created free and equal. To him, theoretically, there was no distinction between Caucasian and African. He was quite accustomed to seeing his vote equalized and even nullified by the vote of his darky coachman; nevertheless, there lingered in him—as there does in many another educated white man—a prejudice that fails fully to recognize the equality of the black.

Without making any attempt to extenuate Crenshawe's frame of mind, let it be said that he felt himself insulted by being asked to work with this gang of blacks. If it had been a voluntary matter with him, he might have done so without hesitation. Certainly, if a black man had been in peril of his life Crenshawe would not have hesitated to imperil his own to save it. But this was another matter, and his mind was instantly made up.

He would resist the outrageous imposition at the start rather than permit the Don to gain any advantage over him by temporary compliance.

So he stood facing the white boss of the gang without moving, and for a few seconds these two looked into each other's eyes. In the one there was calm determination and undisguised contempt; in the other, there could not be said to be surprise at the refusal to work, but there was fury at being disobeyed, and the rising glow of terrible passion.

"Then if you heard me," growled the boss slowly, "you will seat yourself on that lever without any more delay."

"Send for your employer," said Crenshawe. "I decline to discuss the matter with you."

All the blacks around them were continuing their work without paying attention to this scene, except the two who were preparing to operate upon the trunk of the tree. The other trees were already gripped by big pincers, and were held in place by the weight of a man upon each lever.

The two who were waiting for Crenshawe to put his weight on their machines, stared at him, but without any expression of surprise. Doubtless they expected that he would presently yield.

"You defy me, then!" exclaimed the boss. "You will have to learn better."

With that he made a sudden leap towards Crenshawe and from beneath his loose coat he pulled a cowhide whip, which he raised over the American's head, intending to bring it down with full force.

The blow did not land, for on the instant Crenshawe unfolded his arms and both fists shot out like battering rams. One caught the descending arm of the boss and warded off the blow. The other landed full upon the man's swarthy face and sent him reeling backward. This accomplished, without moving from his tracks, Crenshawe again folded his arms and waited.

It was but an instant, for the boss picked himself quickly up, calling to the black men in Spanish, or in their own language—Crenshawe did not know which. In response to his orders a dozen of the blacks left their work and came towards the American with the evident intention of overpowering him.

Then Crenshawe looked alive. His arms came down again, and he braced himself for the assault, meaning to knock out one man after another if that were possible, and determined in any event not to yield as long as he could exert a muscle.

The boss was at the head of the charging party, again with his black whip upraised. His eyes were fixed warily upon Crenshawe, as if he meant in any case not to catch one of those terrible blows again, and the American, seeing that the boss would not reach him ahead of some of the blacks, prepared to knock out the first comers with democratic impartiality with respect to color.

Of a sudden proceedings halted. A stern voice was heard issuing a command, in obedience to which every black halted where he was and stood still. Then came these words in English:

"Do not strike a white man."

The black whip descended slowly to the boss' side, and he turned his eyes in the direction from which the voice came. So also did Crenshawe.

Don Ignacio stood beside one of the strange trees looking thoughtfully upon the scene.

CHAPTER VI.—LAWS OF THE ISLAND.

DON IGNACIO moved his fan slowly back and forth before his face, his eyes resting ever on Crenshawe with an expression of doubt. Beside him

stood Tony, smiling as usual. The lad carried an immense umbrella, folded, but evidently to be opened at his master's command. They stood now in the shade of a tree.

The arms of the boss quivered with excitement as he turned to Don Ignacio and spoke rapidly. There was no understanding his words for Crenshawe, but the purport was plain enough. The fellow was protesting against the Don's orders.

"I know it, Josefo," said Don Ignacio presently, with an impatient shrug of the shoulders. "I saw it all. It was a fine blow he gave you, but you were about to strike him, and I cannot have a white man thus treated."

"But, señor——" began Josefo in great astonishment.

"Silence, Josefo," interrupted the Don.

The foreman subsided, but with a glowering look full of menace toward the American.

"I thank you for your interference," said the latter, "and I take it for granted that this fellow has been acting without your knowledge. I was so sure of it that I asked him to send for you."

The Don said nothing in reply, but his glance betokened that he wished Crenshawe to continue. This the American did as follows:

"I think I must have made it plain to you last evening that I am entirely ready to compensate you for any trouble to which I may put you. I hope I am not above honest labor, and if that is what you prefer to coin, or, if you insist that I work for my keep until I can get word to Hong Kong and so prove that I have coin to pay with, I shall enter no objection, but there must be a definite arrangement and understanding. You may insist, if you please, that I work from morning until night. You may even impose upon me the disagreeable necessity of becoming the companion of these black men. I shall not resist even that arrangement so long—and understand me, please—so long as it is an arrangement.

"I have no doubt that you as a gentleman will admit the entire reasonableness of my position, but your understrapper here presumed upon my distress to give me orders which I would not and will not obey. As soon as we understand each other I am ready to take your directions as to what you want done, but unauthorized orders—never."

"The obedience of orders," said Don Ignacio slowly, "is the first law on this island."

"What am I to understand by that?"

"Just exactly what I said. You have become a resident of the island, and as such you are bound—mark the word—bound by its laws. The sooner you come to an understanding of that the better it will be for you, for while I have a prejudice against the beating of a white man, I have a greater against the disobedience of orders. You have come here to work, and work you must."

"Must!" exclaimed Crenshawe hotly, and then hesitated.

Don Ignacio's language and the tone in which he spoke were both so extraordinary that the American could not feel that he had understood correctly in spite of the fact that the words were well chosen and hardly susceptible of but one meaning. He was casting about in his mind for some alleged inter-

pretation of the words upon which he could base further remarks, when the Don responded.

"Yes, must. White man or black man, all is the same to me."

There was a cue in this, and Crenshawe was quick to act upon it.

"Do not misunderstand me," he said. "I am not declining to work for you because of any foolish pride. It is the fact that I have been so fortunate thus far in life that I have not had to work. But I admit the situation. I admit that I am thrown uninvited upon your—I was about to say hospitality, but I will say upon your mercy—and if your mercy takes the form of requiring physical labor as compensation for succor, very good, you shall have labor."

"Work is what you must do," said the Don sharply.

Crenshawe frowned and his face flushed. This insistence on the part of the Don angered him.

"Once more understand me," he said, "I am not opposing you because of any aristocratic sensitiveness. I stand simply upon my rights as a man—the same rights that the humblest black upon the island has. I do not choose to work under compulsion, and I will not. Offer me your terms for my service, and I will accept or refuse them, as I see fit."

There was a cunning smile upon the Don's face as he asked, "And if you should refuse my terms, what would you do?"

"Leave the island," replied Crenshawe.

"And how?"

"If I could not find a berth as a sailor upon the first boat that touches here, I would leave the way I came."

"You are a bold man," said the Don ironically.

Crenshawe made no reply. After a moment Don Ignacio went on.

"I understood your words. You refuse to work without what you call an arrangement. Very well. You have much to learn. It may all be summed up in what I have said before, that obedience to orders is the first law of this island. The second law, which is equal to it, is summed up in one word—work."

Having said this, the Don turned to Tony and addressed him in a language that Crenshawe did not understand.

Meantime the latter observed that Josefo had been standing sullenly by, awaiting the end of the conversation. The black men were silently working, stripping long fibers from the trees they had felled.

Having finished what he had to say to Tony, the Don took his umbrella from the boy's hand, raised it and marched towards the foliage, which had seemed to Crenshawe to mark the existence of a park. Tony came up to Crenshawe and said:

"You come." Then, with a comically ingenuous smile, he added the word "please."

In spite of the galling nature of the situation, Crenshawe laughed outright.

"By Jove, young man," he cried, "your intelligence is not so limited as I had supposed. You have caught on quicker than your distinguished em-

ployer, for you are aware that the most stubborn of men can be moved by a touch of courtesy, when a team of wild horses couldn't drag him, and he couldn't even be budged by threats. Go with you, young man—will I *please* to go with you? Why, certainly, my dear sir. Lead on, Tony."

The smile never left Tony's face while the American was thus discoursing, and when he had grasped the fact that Crenshawe was ready to follow, he turned and led the way back to the hut where the night had been passed.

Tony did not pause there, however, but continued on past several other huts until a building had been reached considerably larger than the others.

This had a thatched roof like the rest and an apology for windows. There was no glass in the frames, but in place of it were arranged a number of semi-transparent shells. The frames were hinged, and at this time, when no rain threatened, the windows were thrown wide open. So also was the door. Tony entered the place, and Crenshawe, with his mind alert for new surprises, followed.

"Well, my friend," he said, looking around at the one room, "after what has passed I should not have been surprised if the great Don Ignacio had sent me to the guard house. Perhaps this is it, though it doesn't look particularly forbidding."

He looked inquiringly at Tony, but apparently the lad had not understood him. Then Crenshawe resorted to short talk and grimaces.

"What is it?" he asked, sweeping his arms comprehensively about. "What for? What name, you understand? Why come here, eh?"

Tony's smile indicated plainly enough that he understood the purport of the inquiry, but for once his answer was not as satisfactory as were those he was in the habit of giving to Crenshawe.

"No tell," he said. "You wait. See bimeby."

"Well, that's frank at all events," commented Crenshawe as Tony took his departure. "Of course there is some reason for this maneuver, and I presume that Tony's advice is the best I can follow. I will wait, though it won't be for long. It doesn't look much like a prison house any way."

What Crenshawe saw as he looked around the room was, in the first place, a floor of bare earth. Over in one corner was a rude bed such as he had slept on the night before. Near the door was a small table standing on bamboo legs. In the corner opposite the table and on the same side of the room as the bed, was a stone post with an iron ring let into it.

It seemed odd, for the room was so large—fully twenty feet square—that it even suggested a general meeting place, rather than lodging for one man. Yet, if it was a meeting place, where were the chairs? The table might answer well enough for a presiding officer, or the secretary, but—

"Perhaps," thought Crenshawe, "they bring in chairs when they have a meeting. I shouldn't wonder if the Don is going to put me on trial here?"

He looked curiously at the stone post, wondering what it was there for and finding as little possibility of explanation for it as he did for the Don's unreasonable conduct.

"Somehow," thought Crenshawe, "I don't like this part of the proceedings any better than the rest of it, and hang me if I'll stay here."

He strode to the door and was about to step out when his attention was arrested by a word of command. It was not uttered in any language that he knew anything about, but what it meant was tolerably plain from the tone of voice and unmistakable from the action that accompanied it.

It was uttered by a black savage who was approaching the building from the direction of the park. He was walking rapidly, and was now within a dozen paces. He spoke the instant he saw the American issuing from the doorway, and as he spoke he raised his hand. The hand remained raised, and Crenshawe found himself inspecting the muzzle of a revolver.

CHAPTER VII.—FETTERED.

OF course Crenshawe halted. The black man advanced until he was within ten feet of the doorway, and then he seated himself upon a low stool that had evidently been placed there for the purpose. He deliberately crossed his legs, and, still holding the revolver so that it covered Crenshawe, made some remarks, and gestured with his left hand.

The remarks may have been one thing or another. They were gibberish to Crenshawe, but the language of the two hands was easily translated. It meant, "Stay within on pain of death."

As an easy going American citizen, Crenshawe had not faced many perilous or exciting adventures. His struggle in the waves had not been his first battle with the elements for life, but this was the first time he had ever found himself seriously threatened by a human being.

His nerves quivered with the intense desire to leap from where he stood and assault the black man, but luckily there was an element of discretion in his nature which made him pause. Taking into account all the atmosphere of this strange place, the evident malignancy of Josefo, and the cold tyranny of Don Ignacio, there was no reason to doubt that this brute of a savage would pull the trigger of that revolver the instant the American gave any sign of forcible resistance.

Crenshawe withdrew into the building to think it over. He paced up and down for two or three minutes, and at last seated himself upon the stone post. From there he could look through the open window to the spot where his guard sat.

The big black was like a statue. He had lowered the revolver, but it glistened upon his knee. His eyes were fixed upon the doorway.

"There's faithfulness for you," was Crenshawe's ironical thought. "Everything in that man's attitude declares that he will stay there till he starves, if necessary, and that he will show himself murderously alert the moment I make a movement to escape. Confound it all! what is it all about any way? What is it for? What have I done? How in the name of reason can I be expected to stand it? It's an outrage!"

Hot with indignation, Crenshawe leaped from the stone post and strode around the big room, fuming and muttering. Three or four turns in this way worked off his superfluous excitement, and he bethought himself of utilizing his energy in a more sensible way.

He went to the doorway and looked out. The moment he came in view, up went the black's pistol arm while the left repeated its significant gestures.

"Oh, certainly," said Crenshawe with mock politeness, as he wheeled about and went back again.

He looked the room all over. He kicked at the soil in various spots.

"If I could only find so much as a pebble," he said to himself, "I'd try it. What wouldn't I give now for one American baseball! I'd give that nigger the greatest surprise party he has ever enjoyed, and I'd have that revolver of his in half a jiffy."

It was in vain. It seemed as if Don Ignacio, or his cruel agents, had foreseen that some day they would have a prisoner in this shabby house who was an expert at throwing missiles, and had taken care, therefore, to remove everything from it that might be useful to him.

Crenshawe even thought of the shells that composed the windows. but when he touched them he realized that they were altogether too slight and thin to be of the least use. He explored his pockets. although he knew in advance that there was nothing there that could answer for a missile. The heaviest article that he found was a small silver coin.

"I wonder," he thought suddenly, "if that would tempt him."

With this in mind, he went quickly to the door again. The black guard repeated his former tactics of aiming the revolver and gesturing with his left hand. Crenshawe held his ground this time and ostentatiously displayed the coin.

"You want it," he said coaxingly, "heap more—all you can put in your pocket if you have any. Understand?"

The attempted bribery of the faithful guard failed utterly. It is hardly to be supposed that the black man did not know the significance of the coin, although he might be pardoned for not understanding Crenshawe's language.

But in any event, his answer was a shake of the head and a single word of contemptuous accent which sounded remarkably like "pooh."

Meantime his commanding gestures became more emphatic, and Crenshawe once more retired, discomfited and angrier than ever.

He resumed his place upon the stone post, and for a long time sat there watching the guard and waiting for developments. None came. The sun climbed further and further up the sky until it was almost overhead.

The heat was intense. Now and again a black laborer passed near them, but never with so much as a turn of the head to indicate that he was aware of what was going on. That kind of episode was not a particularly cheering break in the monotony.

Crenshawe waited for Don Ignacio or some agent of his to appear. None came, although when the sun seemed to be exactly on the meridian, a black man brought a rice cake to the guard. The latter took it and ate it where he sat, but without removing his eyes from the doorway. Nobody brought any food for Crenshawe. He felt the pangs of hunger severely. and they naturally brought a sense of general exhaustion.

Yielding to this at length, and worn out with sitting there on that stone post, he threw himself upon the shakedown in the further corner. What with

the heat of midday and his general exhaustion, it was not long before drowsiness came upon his puzzled brain and he slept.

From the slant of the shadows when he awoke Crenshawe judged that he had been asleep for about two hours. Glancing through the open doorway he could see the naked foot of his black guard still on duty outside.

"No change in the situation yet, eh," he muttered. "Time passes quicker asleep than awake, and I will see if I can snooze some more."

With this he rolled over, intending to get in a more comfortable position. Something caught his right foot. He wondered if it had got entangled with some of the crude stuff with which the shakedown was made, and he gave his leg a yank in order to free it.

He didn't succeed. Instead of freeing himself, he felt a dull pain in his ankle and found that he could not draw his foot up as he had intended to.

Crenshawe sat up to see what was the matter. The trouble was clear at once, but it was so strange that he sat there stock still for a full minute, staring at it. It certainly seemed as if the climax of surprises had arrived.

There was an iron ring around his right ankle, fitting almost closely to the flesh. This ring was connected by a steel chain with the iron ring let into the stone post. The contrivance, of course, had been put on while he slept.

Slowly Crenshawe turned his head and looked the room over to see if any other change had occurred. The room seemed the same as before—no; there was one little detail that differed. On the table by the doorway was a plate of food. It consisted evidently of rice cakes for the most part, but there was also fresh fruit and a glass of water.

Almost numb with amazement, but with a sense of relief that he was not to be starved to death, Crenshawe rose. Then he stooped and tried to wrench the iron ring from his ankle. It would not budge. He tested the strength of the steel chain by pulling upon it with all his might. It held as if it were a ship's cable made fast to an iron pier.

He stepped over to the stone post and tried to shake it. He could not induce it to so much as quiver. It was evidently set deep in the earth.

For one dreadfully dark minute Crenshawe stood there looking down at the post and at the chain that bound him to it. Then gradually his native buoyancy stirred within him and his spirits rose a bit.

"It's strange beyond all comprehension," he said to himself, "but there's one thing about it, when I do get out of this scrape and get home it will make one of the finest adventures to tell about. Won't I make the folks sit up, though, when I describe this situation?"

He smiled, faintly to be sure, but it was, nevertheless, a smile, and then turned toward the table by the doorway.

"The stuff is put there for me to eat," he thought, "and I might as well take advantage of it."

Accordingly he walked towards the door. The chain clinked disagreeably during the first three or four paces, but it stopped its noise when its length had run out. Crenshawe stopped walking at the same time. The chain was taut.

He looked around at it. He stood now from eight to ten feet from the

post. He turned his eyes to the table. That was—certainly not less than ten feet in the other direction.

There were beads of perspiration upon Crenshawe's brow as he turned his head first towards the post and chain, and then towards the table.

"I'll find out if this is really so," he muttered, half aloud, and his voice trembled.

He knelt upon the ground, stretched himself as far as his fettered leg would permit, and reached out towards the table. It was indeed so.

In no position that he could assume, and by dint of no stretching of arms and legs, could he bring his hand within a yard of the rice cakes, fruit and water.

CHAPTER VIII.—CAPTIVITY'S REALITIES.

It seemed to Crenshawe as if his reason were giving way. He felt dizzy, weak, stirred by the same unreasoning impulse that leads a chained beast to tug vainly at its bonds. It was all so preposterous, unheard of, impossible.

This last word occurred to him, and served quickly as an antidote to his incipient frenzy. Impossible? Well, hardly. And something like his characteristic smile appeared upon his face as he looked at the chain binding him to the stone post. Nothing, unhappily, was so plain in this darksome situation as that same chain. Impossible, indeed!

"It's just as well to recognize the symptoms of insanity," said Crenshawe to himself, "for then one may take measures to prevent their development. Let's begin as near the beginning of things as we can. Firstly, then, here's this chain."

He sat down and picked it up, looking at it link by link and shifting his way along on the ground until he was against the post. In this way, slowly and very carefully, he examined every link. Apparently they were all sound. There was no indication even of a seam where the ends had been welded together.

With the same patient scrutiny he examined the iron ring let into the post and the ring fastened around his ankle. The latter, he thought, might possibly be broken or "worked."

Evidently it was constructed of two semi circles, joined by a hinge and closing with a snap lock. Certainly it could not require much force either to break the hinge or the lock. Crenshawe felt in his pockets, wondering a bit to discover, as he did promptly, that their contents had not been disturbed.

There was not much there to take away, to be sure, but among the articles was an ordinary pocketknife.

He drew it forth, and, after examining the blades, opened one that consisted for the most part of a plain, finely drawn file. The very end only had been sharpened, and this he placed tentatively against the juncture in the ring where he presumed that the lock was. There was no crack there to admit even the point without great pressure, and before he exerted any he stood up and looked out of the window.

There sat the guard, as stolid and faithful as before, and as if further to

accentuate the seriousness of his captivity the savage's pistol barrel lay in such a way that the sunlight reflected from it and caused Crenshawe's eyes to water.

"All right," muttered Crenshawe desperately, "sit there, you barbarian, and I will see what can be done."

Again he seated himself and bent over his ankle, turning the ring in such a way that its lock was uppermost. For a moment he paused, thinking deeply. Presently he shut the file blade of his knife and opened another.

It had occurred to him that at the worst the file might be used to sever one of the links in the chain if not the ring itself. He was determined, however, to put his first thought to the test, and he therefore pushed the smallest blade of his knife into the tiny crack in the ring that indicated the place of juncture. A moment later the blade snapped in two.

Crenshawe looked at the knife and ring in calm discouragement. It was too evident that no progress was to be made in that way. Then he reopened the file blade, and, choosing a link in the chain at random, began to scratch at it. The result of a few minutes' patient work at this demonstrated that if he kept at it long enough the lines on the file would be worn smooth. As for the chain, there was hardly a perceptible scratch to testify to his labor.

The same result followed when he experimented with the file upon the ring. He was working upon super hardened steel with a file that had been designed simply for smoothing his finger nails.

Crenshawe sighed, thrust the knife into his pocket, and leaning his elbows upon his knees, put his chin in his hands, and thought. There was really very little to think about. The situation was plain enough, albeit surrounded by remarkable mystery.

On that point he might speculate indefinitely in the effort to determine why he was treated in this way. Such an effort of his thought was too plainly useless to be pursued at any length. Yankee-like, he preferred to devote his mental energies to schemes for getting out of his dilemma.

He was uncomfortably conscious of hunger, but in the course of less serious adventures in his past he had become somewhat accustomed to long fasts, and so for the present he could endure the cravings of his stomach with equanimity. Everything indicated certainly that some time or other the Don or one of his emissaries would come, and for all that Crenshawe could make out, the one thing to do was to wait with such patience as he could for that event.

It would pass the powers of narration even to indicate how slowly the time dragged along, but it passed somehow, and as evening drew on, one little episode occurred to relieve the monotony.

Crenshawe was sitting upon the stone post at the time. A black man appeared, coming from the direction of the park. He halted beside the silent guard. Some muttered words passed between them, after which the guard arose, gave his revolver to the newcomer and went away. The newcomer thereupon sat down upon the stool, assumed the former's attitude and directed his stolid gaze at the doorway of Crenshawe's prison.

If this changing of guard meant anything, it meant that the prison was to be watched throughout the long night. This conclusion dashed one faint hope

that had arisen in Crenshawe's heart. It was but the shadow of a hope, but it had served to cheer him a bit. He had thought of Tony. That youngster's face was infinitely more expressive than that of any other of the blacks, and Crenshawe could not think that he was mistaken in believing that Tony had a friendly feeling for him.

It had seemed just possible that the little fellow might take pity on him and do something for his relief. With a guard before the door through the night as well as through the day, the possibility of help from Tony vanished.

It was just about sunset when the event for which Crenshawe had awaited occurred. Josefo came. He thrust his head in at the door and showed his teeth in an evil smile. Crenshawe returned his gaze with one of contempt.

"Well," said Josefo, scowling, "are you ready yet?"

"Ready for what?" asked Crenshawe.

"Work."

"Under compulsion?"

"In obedience to orders."

"No," said Crenshawe steadily. "I will talk with Don Ignacio. If he thinks he has anything to gain by treating me in this way, he must come to me to get it. I will not argue with you unless you set me at liberty."

The American's unyielding attitude undoubtedly stirred Josefo's temper. He breathed quickly, and the evil in his eyes burned like hot coals. It seemed as if a little more provocation would cause him to burst into a furious passion.

Crenshawe felt this and stood up. He was chained to a post, but his arms were free. He could even walk a few paces, and he prepared himself for a treacherous assault. There was everything in Josefo's appearance and demeanor to suggest that he would strike if he could do so when his victim was unprepared.

Perhaps Josefo realized why it was that the American stood up. Perhaps, too, he was acting under stringent orders, in accordance with which he kept his passion in check. At all events, he made no move to enter, but turned from the doorway and called to somebody at a little distance.

In answer to his call a black man came up with a handful of dishes, which he set upon the table just within the doorway. He removed the food that had been lying there to make room for them. The dishes were heaped with eatables. There was a greater variety and evidently a better quality than had been placed there before.

Having completed his task, the black man withdrew, and Josefo, pointing to the table, said:

"When you are ready to obey."

That was all.

Josefo departed, and Crenshawe knew that the cravings of hunger could not be satisfied until he should signify his willingness to take his place as one of the Don's laborers.

For a moment his resolution wavered. He doubted what good end could be served by his obstinacy. Why not consent to work—take the food and look for a speedy chance of escaping from the place?

It was but a moment that this thought lingered. It was not work against

which Crenshawe rebelled. He had declared himself as unalterably opposed to working under compulsion, but he began to realize that this was but an imperfect way of stating his opposition to taking part in a system, the horrible nature of which was but beginning now dimly to dawn upon him.

To work with these ignorant black men, without so much as a bargain; to feel that an overseer stood over him, ready to correct with the lash any mistake? No, all this was too suggestive of a system that no civilized man could tolerate to permit him to recede from his attitude, even if the Don should persist in carrying his policy of starvation to the end.

Crenshawe was upheld in his stubbornness by a deep conviction that the Don would not starve him. He believed that this placing of food just beyond his reach was merely a device to torture him into submission.

"If the Don finds that he can't force me," thought Crenshawe, "he will adopt some other expedient. Then we will see if I can't get the whip hand on him."

For hours after the departure of Josefo, Crenshawe kept hoping that the Don would come to him. It was a season of continual disappointment. No Don came, and no episode, even so slight as the changing of the guard, occurred to relieve the terrible monotony.

As the night grew old Crenshawe stretched himself upon the shakedown and slept fitfully. He was constantly tormented by dreams of banquets, at which all manner of savory viands were placed before him, only to be snatched away the moment he tried to eat, or, what was worse yet, he would be just on the point of eating when he would awake with a start. Hunger was making itself felt in dreadful earnest.

At dawn Crenshawe was asleep, and it was not until a hand was placed upon his shoulder that he opened his eyes. He started up at once, anger and hope contending within him, for it was Don Ignacio himself who had aroused him.

CHAPTER IX.—FRIGHTFUL UNREALITIES OF STARVATION.

"Ah, you have come at last," cried Crenshawe, sitting up.

The Don looked at him with an oily smile.

"Are you not about ready for breakfast?" he asked.

"I should be a fool to deny that I am hungry," replied Crenshawe, "but if you had sent that rascal Josefo I should not have admitted it."

"You have great strength of will," said the Don quietly.

Crenshawe saw nothing to reply to in this, and he turned his eyes toward the little table near the doorway.

"Yes," said the Don, observing the glance. "there is food there, but it is the same that you refused to take last night. There will be a fresh supply here presently, something much better suited to such a hungry man as you must be."

Crenshawe rose to his feet.

"Let's come to the point at once," he said sharply. "It is beyond my imagination to fathom your motives in treating me this way, and you'd better

tell me what it is you are trying to gain. On the other hand, Don Ignacio, you are an educated man, and I do not need to tell you that in thus forcibly detaining and torturing an American citizen you are endangering not only yourself but your government. Why, sir, less things than this, outrages of our individual rights far less serious than this, have stirred up international complications that have led to war itself."

"I have no fear of war with your country," replied the Don, smiling with scornful confidence.

"Well, then, let me tell you," cried Crenshawe, hotly, "that while I don't pretend to occupy in my country any such rank as you hold with your people, I am an American citizen, and my government is in the habit of listening to the complaints of its citizens, and that it is quick to avenge their wrongs."

"You threaten me?" said the Don.

"Call it that if you like. I am simply drawing your attention to a state of things of which you should need no reminder."

The Don shrugged his shoulders.

"Are you ready," he asked, "to acquiesce in the laws of the island?"

There was an odd sense of emptiness in Crenshawe's head that fitted well with the terrible faintness in his stomach. He actually reeled a bit as he stood there. It was no wavering of resolution, but simply the irresistible effects of incipient starvation.

He pulled himself together with a mental wrench, and answered:

"I will not, cannot, consent to accept conditions of labor that imply a sanction of the system that you have set up here."

The gleam in the Don's eyes, while fierce and angry, seemed to be not unmingled with admiration for this man's obstinate courage. He looked keenly at Crenshawe for a moment, and then, turning, beckoned to somebody who stood without the doorway.

In obedience to the gesture a black man entered and cleared away the food that had been placed on the little table the night before. Presently he returned and set other dishes upon it. Here indeed was a bountiful repast. No mere rice cakes, but fresh fruit, some kind of cooked meat, delicious looking wheat bread, and, most attractive of all, a steaming urn that filled the prison house with the tempting aroma of coffee.

At the first whiff of the delicious beverage Crenshawe's teeth came together with a click. Don Ignacio smiled. He well knew the terrible temptation it must have been to the suffering man; the sight of food just beyond reach would be incentive enough for most men, but nothing is more provocative of imperative desire to eat than the appetizing incense of coffee. Until now the Don had been quietly watching the movements of the black man. At length, when he was sure that Crenshawe was suffering the added torment of smelling as well as seeing food, he said:

"Even an American who has been brought up in luxury must admit that that is a good breakfast."

Crenshawe shuddered, so great was the effort to control himself in the presence of what he sorely needed, and he turned his back upon both the Don and the tempting table.

"Ah," said the Don insinuatingly, "you should recognize in the quality of the food set before you the high estimate which I have put upon you. The islands round about, Señor Americano, overflow with dark hued workmen. I can have all I want of them. But it is not often that fortune favors me with a man whose brain and will are better than his hands. I should be more than a brute, Señor Americano, I should be a fool if I did not seek to make the best possible use of such implements as fate has thrown in my way. You are keen, señor, and therefore do not need to be told in plainer words that you have only to accord yourself with the irrevocable customs of this place to occupy a comparatively advantageous position among my workmen. They are faithful fellows, but they need skilled direction——"

Crenshawe turned about in a fury.

"You would make me one of your slave drivers, would you, you villain?" he hissed.

Don Ignacio retreated a pace as if startled at the man's impetuosity, and as if he feared assault. His eyes took on an expression of disappointment and surprise, and he responded:

"You can call it what you choose, Señor Americano. It is all one to me. You are to stay here and you are to work. The day may come when you will realize that I have given you an extraordinary privilege. I might compel you under the lash to work with what you call the niggers, but I give you this opportunity to stand in a pleasanter relationship to me and to enjoy a higher grade of living than you could if you were in the ranks."

"And I tell you," said Crenshawe, while his voice quivered with the intensity of his emotion, and he pointed his finger straight at the Don by way of emphasis, "I tell you I would sooner toil till my death in the ranks of your niggers than stand one moment over them as your driver. I tell you further, Don Ignacio, that you haven't got the power to hold me forever chained to this post or to prevent me from leaving your island. And when I leave it, it will be to inform the world—and not one nation, mind you, but the civilized world, of what you do here. And I will bring your whole rotten fabric down in a wreck over your head."

The Don listened intently, and at the end he sneered, and said:

"You come of a nation of braggarts, and so I am not particularly surprised, neither am I offended. I might be, for a true Spaniard is quick to resent imputations upon his honor. In my case, however, I decline to consider an insult from a man who is so far beneath me. Furthermore, I hold to my position that I should be a fool if I did not make use of you, and I propose to turn your best abilities to account. Therefore, in answer to your idle boast, let me assure you that you are not going to leave this island. When I go—perhaps; well, we'll see. You obey orders. Help with your intelligence to develop the fortune that is to be made here, and it may be that I shall let you go, the possessor of wealth as well as liberty."

With this the Don turned and started slowly from the prison house. With wrinkled brows and jaws set hard together Cranshawe watched him until he was just passing the doorway. "It isn't in your power to keep me," he exclaimed then.

The Don made no retort, and again Crenshawe was alone, hunger that seemed well nigh intolerable gnawing at his vitals, and helpless bewilderment gradually seizing upon his brain. He looked out through the window. There was the guard of the previous day sitting like an ebony statue a short distance from the door. Beyond him and going towards the park, holding an umbrella above his head, was Don Ignacio. Just out of arm's reach, as before, was the one thing that he needed to keep his physical forces together and to prevent his mental forces from the worst destruction.

The aroma of coffee swelled in his nostrils, penetrated to his brain and maddened him. With a low moan of anguish he turned about, stooped, picked up his chain and leaped with it towards the further side of the room. He easily leaped back beyond the slack, and when the chain straightened he fell headlong. Down he came on hands and knees, bruised and panting. It seemed as if his foot might be yanked off, but the chain broke not, neither did the stone post budge.

Quickly turning, Crenshawe laid hold of the chain again, dug his heels into the hard ground and wrenched and pulled and twisted at the links, twining the chain about his legs to get a greater purchase, and struggling in all ways like the madman that he threatened soon to be.

Weak as he was from lack of food, the vain exertion soon exhausted him utterly, and he lay still upon the ground, gasping and quivering. Streams of perspiration, fatal signs of weakness, ran from every pore. A few minutes he lay thus, and as he regained breath he also came to his better senses.

The man who could buffet the angry waves of the Pacific for hours was not readily to be driven to insanity by captivity and starvation. Presently, among his other emotions, he recognized a sense of mortification.

"This won't do at all," he muttered, speaking aloud in order to give his thoughts the clearest possible form. "This will never do. I have told that dark skinned ruffian that he can't keep me here, and if I don't hold myself better in check I shall give my words the lie, and at the same time prepare a fair specimen of maniac for him to feed or put out of the way as he thinks best.

"If only he had refrained from that exquisite barbarity of bringing a steaming coffee pot into this place I think I shouldn't have yielded to that frenzy. I won't again. I can think of no way to escape now, and I shall be in no better condition for thinking if I exert myself so extravagantly. It looks as if time only could be depended upon to bring me relief. Something, God knows what, but something may happen, and if I have any sense left I must husband my failing strength to take advantage of it."

This determination having been made and expressed, Crenshawe crawled over to his shakedown and lay there, suffering in silence.

The long day passed. How, he knew not. From time to time his eyes closed, and he became half unconscious, never sufficiently so to be free from suffering, or to lose sight of the fact that time dragged. About midday he heard a black man bringing a rice cake to his guard outside, and when evening came similar sounds proclaimed that the sentinel for the night had come on duty. About that time, too, there was another change made in the horrible mockery of setting a fresh table for him.

When the black entered to attend to this Crenshawe lay over so that his back was towards the doorway. This was partly because it seemed as if he could not endure longer the temptation of food displayed thus, and partly a testimony of his stubbornness in refusing to yield.

When darkness came his senses were painfully acute. By that reference is had, not to the pangs of hunger, but to his thoughts, his consciousness of his surroundings, his realization of his situation. So far as his physical needs went he seemed to have passed the crucial stage in his torment. There was now a dull sense of heaviness—a terrible lethargy pervaded his system that seemed to grow more endurable as the hours passed.

If only, he thought again and again, if only he could become unconscious mentally just as his physical system seemed to be becoming unconscious. In the mind, however, the greatest activity prevailed. It was not the activity of well directed thought. He was no longer capable of that, but he was constantly passing in review former experiences that impressed him as vividly as they had when they were taking place. Interspersed among them were other scenes wholly the product of his morbid imagination, and which could not be called visions of the future, though they impressed him with as distinct a sense of reality as did the others.

It was an awful, waking dream, and, shut his eyes though he would, he could not keep out these visions, some of them pleasant, some of them painful, and above and through all there was an immovable sense of present anguish.

So it happened that when some time in the night his visions seemed to be marked or accompanied by a faint scratching noise, he paid no attention to it. From time to time he aroused himself from his frightful yielding to the reality of these visions to mutter aloud that it was all dreaming; that it was not true; that he must not forget that however things seemed, he was in reality a prisoner here under the cruel hands of a monster known as Don Ignacio.

The faint noise of scratching he firmly believed to be a part of one of these fleeting visions, and he treated it with the same stern incredulity. Despite the greatest effort of his will he could not altogether relieve his consciousness of that apparent sound. Sometimes it seemed, too, as if there were another sound, something like the low breathing of a human being. Now and again it was like the half smothered grunt which men sometimes emit when they are struggling strenuously to accomplish a purpose in silence.

Crenshawe dismissed all these manifestations as equally unreal with his visions, and when at last he actually felt something pushed against his face, he withdrew his head a little but gritted his teeth together, firmly believing that this was another trick of the imagination, that nothing had touched him, and that he must overcome that semblance of touch if he would retain the last remnant of sanity.

Though he withdrew his head slightly the touch followed him. His blood chilled. Had he then passed the crisis, and had madness seized him irretrievably? Had he gone so far in suffering that even his nostrils were prone to distinguish the odor of food where none existed?

In order the more surely to convince his waning senses that he was the victim of terrible hallucinations, he put up his hand, expecting to brush away

nothing from his face. His hand clutched something. It seemed to be—merciful heavens! the seeming was so strong that this was food that no effort to preserve his sanity could prevent him from carrying that imaginary object to his lips, and once there, his teeth closed upon it, and with a wild conviction that this was the last descent to the hopeless whirlpool of madness he ate.

It was not until he had devoured the whole of the rice cake that had seemed to push its way against his face that he was able to realize that this was no trick of a frenzied imagination, but that food had somehow found its way to his prison.

CHAPTER X.—A COMPANION IN CAPTIVITY.

ONCE started on the road to the recovery of his mental equipoise, Crenshawe's progress was rapid. The influence of so small a thing as a morsel of food upon the human system is as extraordinary as it is commonplace. The imperative need of this man for a bit of physical sustenance was too great to be exaggerated, and yet it is fair to presume that a greater element than the food itself in bringing Crenshawe away from the delirium that was rushing upon him, was the discovery that this touch upon his face was no illusion.

After battling for hours with vivid unrealities, it was unspeakable comfort to come once more in contact with the real.

That rice cake had gone the way of all good food with gluttonous rapidity, for which Crenshawe needs to make no excuses. Once it was swallowed and his senses were awake again, he half rose on his shakedown and searched about in the hope of finding other cakes like it. He was not disappointed. There was an abundance of them there. A whole line of them, in fact, reaching from the place where his head had rested to the very wall of the prison house.

Crenshawe ate one after another, and while he kept himself thus busy, he felt about with his hand, hoping to discover how they had been placed there. This search was fruitless, and it was not continued very long. The presence of the cakes was sufficient for the time being. It was much more to him than the food itself, for it indicated that among the inhabitants of this dreadful place there was at least one who was friendly to him. He had been supplied on this occasion, and he believed, therefore, that he could count upon further supplies as time should go on.

Nevertheless, it occurred to him that, considering the constancy with which the guard was kept upon him, and the evident secrecy with which this succor had been brought to him, there might be difficulty in placing a regular supply of food within his reach.

Accordingly, although the demands of his appetite might not have been wholly satisfied with the ample supply of cakes that had been put in there at this time, he checked himself before they were half eaten. He knew now that he could at least pass the night without the torment of these hunger inspired visions. So he carefully tucked the rest of the cakes beneath his shakedown, composed himself upon it, and was soon in natural slumber.

The Don did not awaken him the next morning, but not long after day-

break he appeared. Crenshawe was sitting upon the shakedown at the time, leaning his back against the house wall. Within reach of his right hand were the precious rice cakes. He looked at the Don insolently, for the presence of that food stimulated the courage that had hardly been shaken by his trials, and gave him a firm basis upon which to maintain his contention.

"So," said the Don, after a moment, "are you ready at last?"

"For what?" asked Crenshawe.

"Obedience to orders, work, breakfast?"

"The last, yes. The others, no."

Don Ignacio looked at the prisoner for a full minute in silence. He was plainly as much puzzled as provoked by this extraordinary obstinacy.

"This cannot last forever," he muttered at length, and strode away.

"Go on, you old villain," murmured Crenshawe. "It will last as long as my unknown friend supplies me with food."

Thereupon he reached to his supply, pulled forth one of the cakes and raised it to his lips. At that instant the Don reappeared in the doorway. With a horrible quaking of the heart, Crenshawe dropped his hand.

As before, the Don halted on the threshold and looked thoughtfully at his prisoner before speaking.

"Are you—well—" he began, then hesitated, and at length turned about and went away without completing what he had begun to say.

"Ye gods!" was Crenshawe's silent exclamation. "Catch me risking my one hope for life and sanity like that again!"

The prisoner's breakfast was delayed until the Don had certainly returned to the park and presumably to his house, and even then was eaten with the utmost secrecy. Crenshawe limited himself to one of the rice cakes.

After it had been disposed of a thought occurred to him that should have come earlier. The ring around his ankle and the chain connecting it with the post were of superhardened steel. He had already learned that his tiny file could make no impression upon either, but there was the ring in the stone post; that seemed to be of ordinary cast iron. In any event, it was undoubtedly much softer than the links of the chain, and possibly the little file could be made to cut through it.

He stepped to the post, leaned over it and began cautiously to scrape the ring with the file. He had not been occupied thus long enough to satisfy himself whether the experiment would fail or succeed, when he started at the sound of a voice.

"It is useless, my friend, you cannot break the fetters of Ignacio."

Crenshawe whirled about as quickly as if he were expecting a savage assault, whereas he knew that nothing of the kind could be intended. There was no barbarous, or Spanish accent in that voice. There was no tone of tyranny or unfriendliness. It was rather mournful and sympathetic.

He saw standing in the doorway a man whose bronzed face lacked the deep darkness of the Spanish complexion, and whose features proclaimed him to be of the same race as the prisoner. The newcomer was of medium height and young. He was clad in a rough semblance to civilized garments.

For several seconds these two stood staring at each other. Then Cren-

shawe, whose mind was affected most by the singular words that had been spoken, answered:

"I am no man's slave."

"You are Don Ignacio's," said the other slowly.

"And you?"

"I also."

There was then an impressive pause, for though this statement of the situation could not smack of novelty, after the long time that had passed since Crenshawe became convinced that the Don was maintaining the horrible system of slavery on this island, the utterance of the fact in so many measured words, and the calm air of conviction, brought the truth home with appalling force.

"You are an American," said Crenshawe presently.

"No," replied the other, "English, and as sensitive as to my personal freedom as you. Like yourself, I was cast away and floated to this shore. My name is Edwardes—Walter Edwardes, of Bentley Manor, Stockton-on-Tee, Yorkshire."

This announcement of name and full place of residence was given with a sad irony of accent that went straight to Crenshawe's heart, awakening a deep throb of sympathy there in spite of the fact that at the moment he was apparently the greater sufferer of the two.

"You have an estate, then," said Crenshawe.

"No. Even if I had the title to an estate I could hardly be said to have it while my residence is on this terrible island. My family, however, possesses the estate I named. I am a younger son. Possibly you know that in England there is oftentimes little encouragement for a younger son to stop at home. Would to God that I had done so, but regrets are vain. I sought to see the world, and having come as far as this point I expect to see no more of it."

"Don't you believe it!" exclaimed Crenshawe energetically. "Here I am chained up like a dog, but I am telling you, Mr. Walter Edwardes, that I mean to see a good bit more of the world. Storms may prevent me, but Don Ignacio and all his hordes of slaves and slave drivers shall not keep me from one more sight at least of Brooklyn, New York, United States of America. Pardon me," he exclaimed, as he observed a flush upon the Englishman's bronzed cheeks. "I don't mean to cast any reflections upon your nerve. Doubtless you have tried to escape."

"Many times," said the other sadly.

"Well then, we'll consider that in a moment. My name is Kenneth Crenshawe. I have told you where I am from. I don't know how you happen to have done me the honor of calling upon me this morning, but I am right glad to see you, and I suggest that we confine our conversation pretty largely to making up our minds how we are going to get out of this. What do you think?"

The Englishman's somber face lit up with joy.

"Think!" he cried, advancing to Crenshawe with outstretched hand. "think! man alive, I have been too apathetic under this unremitting slavery

to do any sort of thinking for months, but I don't believe that my brain has lost its power. You inspire me, Mr. Crenshawe. You revive hope and courage at once. It seems to me that I have tried every way to escape, but I have been alone, and two may accomplish what one has failed in. I give you my word, Mr. Crenshawe, that you can count on me to the last in any enterprise, no matter how dangerous and desperate, that you may suggest."

CHAPTER XI.—EDWARDES EXPLAINS.

CRENSHAWE took the outstretched hand and gripped it hard.

"We stand together," he said, "and it should be your part to speak first. You have been here longer than I have, and confound me, if I feel that I have a right to do much talking to a white man while I am chained by the leg to a post, but if I may make a suggestion, suppose you give me as clear an idea as you can of what this situation is any way, and how it comes that this Don Ignacio has the nerve to impress first an Englishman and then an American into what is substantially slavery."

"Slavery is the only word for it, and so far as impressing you and me into it, Don Ignacio could not help himself."

"Can't help himself!" cried Crenshawe.

"That is just it, as I will show you. I do not need to say that the man is a thorough going villain. He knows no scruples, but, like many Spaniards, is a strange compound of craft and folly. Some things that he does strike you as absurdly foolish—utterly unreasonable——"

"Then a Yankee and an Englishman together ought to outwit him."

"So it would seem, theoretically, but in fact he seems to be sufficiently resourceful to raise an insuperable bar against any craft that can be employed against him. It is commonly believed that craft is better than brute force, but when brute force is of the unyielding kind, craft will batter its head in vain. That post and chain, for example; you can't break the chain; you cannot file the links apart. Of what use is craft to you under such circumstances."

"Well," replied the American, "I am not so sure. I haven't been here long enough to decide that I may not yet outwit the enemy."

"He will starve you first."

"Will he?"

There was a ring of exultation in Crenshawe's voice that Edwardes noticed, and he looked inquiringly at the American. Crenshawe was thinking of the food so mysteriously supplied to him, and it was on the tip of his impulsive tongue to speak of it; then he hesitated.

Could he trust this man on an acquaintance of five minutes? Might it not be that Edwardes himself had supplied the food? If so, the Englishman would speak of it. Crenshawe's discretion took the upper hand, and he was silent to Edwardes' look of inquiry.

"I do not think," said Edwardes, "that he will abate the torture to which he is subjecting you, and I must say that I marvel at the way you have endured it thus far, but let me come to the matter we wish to discuss. You

asked me for an explanation of the situation, and I begin by startling you with the announcement that Don Ignacio cannot help making slaves of us. Here is the point. Years ago—how many, I don't know, but it was a long time—he took possession of this island. It is one of a group lying north of Luzon, the largest of the Philippines. Geographically, it is a part of the Philippine Islands, and is therefore a Spanish possession. It is generally believed that all this group of small islands is uninhabited."

Crenshawe nodded from time to time, to show that these were facts with which he was conversant.

"Very well," continued Edwardes, "Don Ignacio took possession of this island. There was nobody to say him nay. Doubtless he argued that the soil here must be just as productive as that of Luzon and a hundred other islands in the Philippine archipelago. That it had remained uninhabited presumably is due to its small area. It covers only a few square miles, and is therefore insufficient in extent to support a tribe. Be that as it may, the Don came here and brought with him natives of other islands and impressed them into his service. I am convinced that what he is doing is tacitly understood by the government that the Spaniards have established in the Philippines, but even if the real situation is not known, the fact remains the same so far as we are concerned. He maintains slavery here. It would be the death blow to the horrible system upon which he is building his great fortune if the fact should become known. Suppose you were free, Crenshawe, would you not be inclined to report this situation at once to Spanish officials at Manila?"

"Yes, I would, or to the American consul general there, or at Hong Kong."

"Exactly. And in either case the situation would be brought to the official attention of the Spanish authorities. That would mean, first, the Spanish government would have to take cognizance of the existence of slavery upon one of its islands, and it would mean, second, that the Don would be not only deposed, but ruined, financially, politically, socially, and in every other way."

"Of course," cried Crenshawe hotly, "and that is just what I would like to bring about."

"You can't be more eager for it than I am," said the Englishman sadly, "but you must begin to realize how we stand. No trading ship ever calls at this island except vessels owned by the Don himself. Nobody, unless, perhaps, a few winking Spanish officials, knows that this island is inhabited. Now then, a storm sends a stranger to the shore. He is an American, or an Englishman, or whatever you like, so long as he is an intelligent, observant man. Because the Don's boats are few and make infrequent trips either to Manila or the mainland, such a castaway must remain here a considerable time. An observant castaway could not be here a week——"

"I see," interrupted Crenshawe; "He would discover the existence of slavery, and the Don would be in mortal terror lest he report it as soon as he get away."

"Yes," said Edwardes, "and therefore to prevent the spreading of that

damaging and destructive report, the Don is obliged forcibly to detain everybody who comes here and to make him a slave like his unfortunate blacks."

"Then," said Crenshawe soberly, "as the man has had brain enough to establish and maintain this system a number of years, it seems to follow that he has brain and force enough to prevent a man from getting away from the island. I don't quite see why he shouldn't murder me outright instead of chaining me to a post to die by the slow process of starvation, if I persist in refusing to submit."

"That question," responded Edwardes, "I cannot answer with positive satisfaction to myself, but I have a theory. So far as the blacks are concerned, I don't think that the Don has the least scruple about putting them to death, although in the year that I have been here I am not aware that one of the slaves has been deliberately killed. You see, it may be that it is a part of the secret bargain he has with the Spanish government. He may be permitted to maintain slavery on the understanding that he must do it in such a way that the natives will have no serious cause for complaint."

"They would certainly have serious cause enough if he should murder them."

"Yes, but with their low grade of intelligence, they may be expected to submit to his exactions without complaint, especially as they can have no communication with their fellow tribesmen on other islands."

"Does the Don ever go slave hunting?" asked Crenshawe.

"There has been nothing of that kind that I am aware of since I came here. But to return to my theory as to the safety of our lives. While the Don might cover up the death of a black man with comparative ease, there is always danger that he might have trouble if he should dispose of a white. Furthermore, my family is well to do. He understands that you also are a man of property. I have an idea that while he dares not let you leave the island, he hopes to keep you here in such a way that when he is ready to go himself he can add the last item to his big fortune by extorting a ransom for us from our friends. It is a mere theory, you understand. I have no evidence to base it on except what you yourself see."

"It sounds reasonable," said Crenshawe.

"Well, that covers about everything that I can tell you save details that you may inquire about later. So I may as well come to the point."

"Great Scott," exclaimed Crenshawe, "the point! I thought we came to the point as soon as we recognized that there were two white men in the same scrape."

"Ah, yes, but there is another. Don Ignacio sent me to you, and I must tell you why."

CHAPTER XII.—COMPLETE CONFIDENCE ESTABLISHED.

"THE Isle of Night is rich in marvels," said Crenshawe, "and it seems to me that a fair climax is reached in this. I should have thought that the Don would do his best to keep two men like us apart, rather than to deliberately bring about a meeting."

"He is exceedingly anxious for your speedy submission," said Edwardes.

"Which the same he won't get," stubbornly cried Crenshawe.

"Now there is room for argument in that," rejoined the Englishman earnestly. "I think I understand your temper, and you may misinterpret what I am going to tell you. But if you will be patient I believe I can show you that it will be better to yield. The Don doesn't want to make an ordinary slave of you. He realizes that you have qualities that fit you for something superior to manuel——"

"I know," interrupted Crenshawe hotly; "he wants to make me one of his slave drivers, and I won't have it. I might consent to be a common slave if there was anything to be gained by it. But take a position of authority over these poor devils, never! I couldn't respect myself for the rest of my life if I did."

There was an expression of infinite sadness upon the Englishman's face, mingled with unmistakable admiration for the captive's stamina.

"Crenshawe," he said hesitatingly, "I am going to suffer your contempt for a few minutes at least, by making you a confession. About a year ago I was chained to that post as you are. I was driven nearly insane with starvation because I, too, resisted the Don's outrageous proposal to better my condition by becoming one of his slave drivers. Well, I yielded, and I today carry this emblem of my authority."

So saying he drew from beneath his coat a black whip like the one that Josefo had raised over the obstinate American.

Crenshawe looked grave.

"I am almost sorry you told me," he said. "I do not feel contempt, Edwardes; not that exactly, but—confound it, man, I pity you."

Edwardes flushed scarlet.

"That's as bad as contempt," he murmured. "But you will hear me out, will you not?"

"Of course I will," said Crenshawe. "See here," and he extended his hand. When Edwardes had grasped it, he continued: "You came to me with the word 'friend' upon your lips. Do you suppose that I could condemn you, even on your own confession, until I had heard all the circumstances?"

"Ah," said Edwardes huskily, "you are a true man. Listen then, and see whether I was altogether wrong and whether you may not profit a bit by my experience. I don't think that you can be more totally opposed to the Don and his horrible system than I am. I know that I resisted until, from lack of food I was beside myself, and when at last I gave my submission I believe I can honestly say that I was not aware of what I did. But I yielded; the fetters were struck promptly from my limbs, and I was free at least to eat and toil."

Edwardes paused, pressing his lips hard together, and turning his eyes aside. The recollection evidently was distressing, and before he spoke again Crenshawe was overcome by a great throb of guilt.

"What right have I," he said to himself, "to stand in judgment over this brave fellow, after what I suffered yesterday and last evening? By this morn-

ing I, also, might have been driven so far toward insanity as to yield unwittingly to the Don's demands. How do I know what I might have done if it had not been for the food mysteriously conveyed to me? Starvation was averted from me, and therefore I am able to maintain boldly my opposition. If he had had the same luck as I have, of course he would have done the same."

Crenshawe was again tempted to speak of the food that had been conveyed to him, but before he yielded to the impulse Edwardes resumed:

"Having yielded, I soon persuaded myself that I had done well to do so. You see, I was doing neither myself nor anybody else any good by remaining a stubborn, starving captive. Free to move about, I could not only keep myself alive in comparative comfort, but I could do something to alleviate the miseries of the black wretches with whom I was associated. You, yourself, a moment ago suggested that by craft you might gain your freedom. Why isn't it a proper enough part of craft to pretend submission to the Don, for the sake not only of your own comfort but that of the slaves? Why, man alive, do you suppose that I have ever used this whip? I have had to pretend to no more than one occasion, but it has never yet fallen upon the back of a slave with force enough to hurt him."

"By Jove, Edwardes," exclaimed Crenshawe, "but you are indeed reading me a lesson. At the same time, I must say that my pride rebels a little at even appearing to yield to the infernal scoundrel. I believe I could fight him out on this line until he himself would go crazy wondering how I did it. And it's a great temptation to do so."

Edwardes looked mystified. It was evident enough that the American had, or believed he had, resources of which he had not spoken. For without them no sane man could look forward to an indefinite period of starvation with any hope of success. Then, there was the captive's present appearance. He did not look like one who had been suffering a prolonged fast.

Crenshawe saw that Edwardes was aching to inquire what he meant, and again he was on the point of confessing. But another idea occurred to him, and he was quick to act upon it.

"Edwardes," he said eagerly, "you saw me trying to make an impression upon that iron ring with the file blade of my knife. I don't think I could do it; but with an ordinary file I could cut through it in a night. Now, see here. There's only one guard on this place, the one stationed there before the door. Why can't you smuggle a file to me? There must be such a tool about the place, and if there isn't you can bring me a saw, or a table knife. Anything steel that has an edge. I'll turn it into a file quick enough."

He spoke with intense eagerness, and wondered that the Englishman did not respond by some show of interest or hope. On the contrary, Edwardes shook his head and looked more serious than he had done since the beginning of the conversation.

"I hope, Crenshawe," he said, "that we shall hang together long enough for you to realize that I would undertake any risks in your behalf that would promise the least atom of good. I could smuggle a file to you, I presume. But what would be the result? Granted that you could cut your way to free-

dom of movement with your knife, where would you go? You would find escape from the island as impossible as I have found it. You'd like to try it; I know just how you feel. But let me tell you that aside from the fact that you would gain nothing by it, there are others who would suffer the worst."

"How so?"

"Each one of the guards would instantly be put to death. I say instantly, but I am wrong. Death would only come to them as a relief from prolonged torture. Investigation would be made. With no especial evidence to base it on, it would be far reaching, and I shudder to think of how many innocent blacks would be subjected to horrors indescribable in the effort to discover who had been so faithless as to help you. You have read something of the Spanish Inquisition, I suppose."

"I have," answered Crenshawe. "And you need say nothing more. I withdraw my suggestion that you smuggle a file or anything else to me."

There was silence for a moment, and then Crenshawe said:

"You have persuaded me, Edwardes. I will pretend to yield, but on one condition. We are to devote our united energies henceforth to finding a means for escape and to compass the destruction of the Don's system and himself with it."

"It is agreed," said Edwardes, "and I will now make my report to the Don."

"What are you going to tell him?"

"Only that I think that when next he comes to you, he will find you ready."

"He must think you had a hard argument with me. We have been talking a long time."

"It really doesn't matter what he thinks, Crenshawe, for you see the man is so secure in his arrangements for preventing the knowledge of his doings from going abroad, that he may even believe that we are planning, as we are, to escape from him. What does he care? He has us, and is certain that we cannot break away. What harm can come to him, therefore, if we do amuse ourselves by debating impossible plans for escape? And I am afraid," he added sadly, "that they are impossible."

"We shall see," said Crenshawe confidently.

Edwardes appeared to hesitate. The truth was, as he afterwards made known to Crenshawe, he suspected then that the captive had found a friend among the people on the island. But with an Englishman's sensitiveness he forebore from asking about it until the American should lead the way directly to questions.

He felt that Crenshawe held him in some degree of reserve, not to say suspicion; and while he could not blame the American for this, he regretted it. It was in the hope of inducing Crenshawe to speak freely of all occurrences that he asked:

"How did you know that this place was called the Isle of Night?"

"It was one of the first questions I asked of the man who found me on the shore. He was a little chap——"

"Tony?"

"Yes; that was the name he gave."

"I see now. Tony is one of the few blacks here who knows anything of English, and he translated the name for you. Properly it is Isla de Noce. Do you understand Spanish?"

"I do not."

"That's a little unfortunate for our future operations, although I know the language well enough, and can act as your interpreter if the occasion should arise. I have also learned something of the language of the blacks since I have been here."

"Did you teach English to Tony?"

"No. He also is a castaway. He has been here a long time. His mother, I think, was a servant in an English family in Hong Kong. Tony is a great exception, Crenshawe, among the inhabitants of this place. He is devoted to me. I haven't a doubt he would give his life for my sake. If you have made a good impression upon him, depend upon it that you can trust him."

"Then see here," said Crenshawe suddenly, and turning, he pulled aside a part of his shakedown and showed the supply of rice cakes.

Edwardes opened his eyes wide.

"I am glad you were saved some of my sufferings," he said. "And I presume you guess that it was Tony who came to your relief."

"There could be nobody but Tony, except yourself."

"I am not guilty. I did not know that there was another white man on the island until this morning, when the Don sent for me to come and persuade you. You mustn't leave these cakes there, Crenshawe. Tony might not be suspected of smuggling them to you, but somebody would, and horrible torture would result."

CHAPTER XIII.—THE GAME COCK.

"I'll see that the Don doesn't find those cakes," said Crenshawe, "and if the coast is clear I will dispose of them now."

Edwardes stepped to the door and remarked that nobody was in sight except the stolid guard. Thereupon the prisoner devoured the entire stock of food that had been smuggled to him.

As he sat there on the shakedown, munching and thoroughly enjoying the coarse fare, he made a careful inspection of the side of the house, to find how it was that the cakes had been conveyed to him.

It was not at all clear. The house walls were formed of upright bamboo posts stuck into the ground side by side. It was impossible to separate them by prying. Crenshawe tried it, and could not get so much as a finger between them.

"It doesn't matter much," he concluded. "The great point is that the food was brought here in time to be of service, and I shall get it out of the way before it can do any damage."

"We shall doubtless see a great deal of each other," said Edwardes when he took his departure. "You had better make up your mind to let craft play the part of seeming submission, even to Josefo's orders. For it won't do you

a particle of good to lose your temper. And meantime, whenever you think of any device for escape, let me know, and count on it that I shall be with you to the end."

After the Englishman had gone, Crenshawe seated himself upon the stone post, whence he could get the best view of the vicinity, and kept his eyes in the direction of the park, hoping for the appearance of Don Ignacio. He was now eager to be released from this form of captivity, and as he sat there his mind was active with schemes looking to freedom from the larger captivity involved in becoming one of Don Ignacio's slaves.

A good many things occurred to him, but along with his planning, his mind was quite as much occupied with wondering as to what kind of a life this man led here. He could have done nothing to ostracise himself more completely from civilization than this establishing and maintaining of slavery. It seemed to Crenshawe as if such a course must necessitate many sacrifices to a man of the Don's evident tastes, evident, for it was at least supposable that he would care more for the material luxuries of life than for its refinements.

"It must be a big stake that he is playing for," was Crenshawe's conclusion, "else he would not devote his best years to such barbaric living as can be obtained here."

Fully an hour had passed, and Crenshawe was beginning to grow impatient and not a little suspicious of the outcome, when he was relieved by the sound of approaching footsteps. They did not come from the direction of the park, and it was not the Don who presently put in an appearance.

Instead of him came the hateful Josefo. His lips parted when he looked in upon the prisoner, his teeth gleamed and his eyes glittered; but it could not properly be said that Josefo smiled. It was rather a fierce snarl, suggesting the depth of malignancy that fairly poisoned his brain, so venomous was it.

"So at last you admit," he hissed, "that you are no better than the other brutes who have come to this island. You, too, have a stomach, have you? You would have us believe that a braggart American can exist on high words and lofty ideas. Bah, you are carrion like the rest, and had I the power that the master has, carrion you would be in earnest before sundown. But I understand that you are ready at last to submit."

There were pauses between the different sections of this brutal speech, for Josefo had expected that the American, weak as he was supposed to be, would yet be stirred to an angry retort. Doubtless nothing would have pleased the rascal better than to be loaded with insults. Perhaps he hoped to torment the captive into a further attitude of obstinacy, so that he could report to the Don that it was better to leave the fellow there to starve.

If such were the case, Josefo must have been bitterly disappointed; and so it seemed, if the deepening of his scowl and the increasing bitterness of his snarl told anything of his real feelings. Crenshawe remained silent, hardly looking at the man, and at last Josefo exclaimed:

"Put your foot up there."

"There" referred to the stone post. It took a good deal of self control on the part of Crenshawe to refrain from retorting to the effect that Josefo might kneel, if what he wished to do was to unlock the fetter upon the captive's limb.

But now all Crenshawe's force of character was concentrated in a resolution to hold himself in check and await events. He would win over this man and his master. His resolution went no further than this. Details must be left to future developments. For the present, and for all the time he should be upon the island, it must be his part to conceal his hand in the game that then began.

So Crenshawe placed his foot upon the stone post, Josefo produced a key, inserted it in a mere crack in the steel ring, and the next instant the American's freedom of movement was assured.

For a moment he stood still looking at Josefo, as the latter loosed the chain from the post and placed the whole contrivance in his pocket.

"What are you waiting for?" demanded Josefo sharply.

"Your orders, kind sir," replied Crenshawe, with marked irony.

"Orders, you idiot," fairly shouted the other. "What are you made of, or have you gone hopelessly mad? Have you no stomach left?"

As he spoke Josefo was pointing at the table near the door. Crenshawe instantly bethought himself of the situation.

It was supposed by this man that the prisoner had been for days now without food. The one natural thing for him to do, then, upon receiving this small share of liberty, was to take advantage of the repast that had been kept so long just beyond his reach.

Acting instantly on the suggestion, and ashamed of himself that he had not thought to play his part better, Crenshawe fairly leaped to the little table and began to devour the food there greedily. Josefo stood by, looking on and scowling. Whatever suspicions may have formed in his ugly mind were not uttered, but he watched the American sharply until every morsel of food had disappeared.

There was no great difficulty in that process, for Crenshawe, satisfied though he had been with the smuggled rice cakes, was far from feeling his hunger wholly appeased. At the end, he turned about, faced Josefo, and asked:

"Is that all I can have?"

"All," growled Josefo. "It is a thousand times more than you deserve. Go out to the grove of hemp trees and await orders."

"Hemp trees?" repeated Crenshawe. "Where are they?"

"You ought to know. It is where you were first set to work."

Crenshawe accordingly left the prison house, and as he did so the guard rose from the stool near the doorway and walked off toward the park. Josefo took another direction, and Crenshawe turned toward the grove through which he had passed on his arrival at the island.

He understood now what the laborers were about when they cut down and prepared to strip those curious trees. They were getting fiber for the production of rope. It was a small point, but Crenshawe found that it interested him exceedingly.

He had gone not more than half way from the prison house to the grove when a queer noise caused him to turn his eyes in the direction of the park. He saw a fine specimen of game cock, with wings half outspread, head lowered

as if for attack, and claws digging into the turf as if bracing himself for resistance.

If Crenshawe had looked at the bird only, he might have supposed that the game cock had been posed thus for a photograph, for the attitude was an ideal one of combat. But the same glance that revealed the bird showed also the cause of the commotion. An immense hawk was swooping down, talons outstretched, to secure its prey. The game cock, wise for its kind, had seen that it was too late to retreat, and all its fighting blood was up to resist the monster foe to the death.

Crenshawe was not a sport in the vulgar acceptation of the term, but, like every healthy man, he had a genuine love of contest and a frank admiration for well trained fighting qualities. So it was instinctive that he should pause where he was to observe the outcome of this odd conflict.

The hawk was much larger than the game cock, and at the very first assault, which occurred within a second after Crenshawe saw it impending, the domestic bird was bowled over by the one from the clouds. There was a violent thrashing of wings, loud, shrill squawking from the under bird, a hovering over of the darker pinions of the hawk, and now and again a flash as the game cock struck out vigorously in the attempt to pierce his adversary's neck or body.

For a second or two Crenshawe fairly thrilled at the spectacle. The under bird was putting up a magnificent fight.

Then of a sudden his emotions revolted. A striking comparison suggested itself to him. Here was the under bird, highly developed, skilfully trained, well brought up, in the sense in which that phrase would apply to its breed. Overcoming it by brute force was a black monster whose only purpose in existence seemed to be to prey upon and slaughter weaker members of the feathered tribe.

It was as if Crenshawe himself were in the place of the game cock, and the overpowering, brutal mass represented the Don and his heartless system of slavery.

A strained comparison, perhaps; but the American was in just the mood to be sensitive to such matters at the time, and the thought had no sooner suggested itself than he leaped from where he stood and rapidly crossed the space intervening. Arrived at the scene of conflict he caught the hawk by the neck and tried to pull it away from its prey. There was a tremendous fluttering and squawking, as both birds felt a new access of terror in the presence of apparently a common foe.

"Ouch!" muttered Crenshawe, in response to a sharp dig in the ankle, given him by the spur of the beleaguered rooster.

It was a blow from the one he meant to save. But it did not affect his temper. He leaped aside, and as he did so the game cock, freed from his former adversary, struggled to his feet and staggered away.

The hawk proved rather a stubborn and difficult antagonist. Crenshawe might have let him go, but he preferred to do otherwise, possible for the sake of getting revenge for that sharp little blow in the ankle. Accordingly, as he held the bird of prey around the throat with one hand, he drew his pocket

knife with the other and managed to open the blade, and a moment later the hawk fluttered headless at his feet.

"That's not a bad job for an amateur," Crenshawe was thinking, when he was surprised by a series of hysterical cries from the direction of the park.

He knew the voice, but what it all meant mystified him. The Don was on the run toward him. He had dropped his umbrella, was waving his arms frantically and crying out, probably in Spanish.

"What the mischief is he up to now?" thought Crenshawe, and he kept his open knife in his hand, prepared for an assault.

It was a needless precaution. The Don did not go as far as Crenshawe, but, stooping, he picked up the game cock and began to caress it extravagantly, muttering and murmuring over it in gibberish that was unmistakably meant for expressions of affection.

Crenshawe stared in amazement. At length the Don, having set the bird down, and seen that it could walk and was not seriously injured, turned to the American and said:

"Ah, it was you, Americano. You have won my heartfelt gratitude. I knew you were a brave man. You are valiant, noble hearted. I shall reward you. You have done your master an inestimable service."

CHAPTER XIV.—ON THE COAST.

FOR a moment it seemed as if the Don were on the point of running up to Crenshawe and embracing him. He made a little movement in that direction, then hesitated, looked toward the rooster, spoke to it in caressing accents, started again for Crenshawe, and finally chose the bird.

He ran to it, picked it up in his arms again, caressing it as gently as if it had been a sick child, and only addressing to Crenshawe a repetition of his former declaration of gratitude. "I shall reward you. Your noble heart shall not go without its payment for this inestimable service."

Mumbling after this manner, Don Ignacio withdrew, carrying his bird.

Crenshawe was more than astonished. He was amused. It seemed such a singular contradiction in the character of this brutal Spaniard that he should torture a human being with extremity of suffering, without an apparent throb of conscience, and yet go into an ecstasy of sympathetic sentimentalism over a rooster.

"I can't quite understand it," said Crenshawe to himself. "But if the old tyrant will only bring on that promised reward I shall be glad it happened."

The squawking of the bird and the excited cries of the Don had attracted a good deal of attention from various directions; black men came hurrying up to see what was the matter, and having observed, turned about, most of them, and returned to their occupations. One or two stood looking at the Don idly, and he, too intent upon his pet to notice them, passed them without a word.

Among those who came upon the scene was Edwardes. Crenshawe went over to him.

"What the mischief does all this mean?" the American asked.

"You saved the rooster, didn't you?" responded Edwardes.

"I believe I did."

"You have done a good thing. I believe it will prove to be most fortunate."

"But it amounted to nothing. It was simply the tackling of a hawk whose neck was a bit difficult to wring. Why should the Don make so much fuss over it?"

"The Don," replied Edwardes, "is like all other residents of the Philippine Islands, in that he is passionately addicted to cock fighting. In this part of the world the rooster is man's favorite pet. He takes the place of the dog in man's affections, and the love of Don Ignacio for his game cock is the only evidence I have seen of a soft spot in his heart. You may call it a low down order of sentiment, but it is real, and you have been lucky to touch it."

"For which I am devoutly thankful," said Crenshawe, with a ring of sarcasm in his tone. "I have been ordered to go to this grove of hemp trees where I began my rebellion. Where do you work?"

"I am in charge of a gang of men about two miles away. We are just now engaged in plowing a rice field. You will have comparatively an easy time, especially in view of what has just happened. No overseer, not even Josefo—who is the worst of the lot—would venture to offer you any indignity today. That is, if you keep your American temper well in hand."

"I shall look out for that—never fear. What do you suppose the Don will do in the way of a reward?"

Edwardes laughed. "Nothing, most likely," he said. "To have made this advance in his good graces will doubtless cause your first days as a laborer to be comparatively pleasant."

"My first days as a slave, you mean," retorted Crenshawe rather bitterly. "Tell me, shall I see you again?"

"Yes, I shall be up at your quarters—which probably will be near your prison house—this evening. I suppose you have some plan of escape already in mind, eh?"

"I have an idea."

"We will talk it over this evening."

They were now near the hemp grove and there they separated. Edwardes went on to his distant rice field, and Crenshawe waited with a number of blacks, who had gathered there preparatory to stripping the trees. Presently Josefo arrived upon the scene, and at his command the work began.

As Edwardes had prophesied, there was nothing more unpleasant about it than the constant feeling of irksomeness, due to standing about under the orders of a dark faced villain, who had no decent right to issue a command. Josefo scowled and gave the American the benefit of many an ugly glance, but he seldom spoke to him, and whenever he did it was in a tone milder on the whole than that in which he addressed the blacks.

Crenshawe was not regarded as a skilled laborer. All he had to do throughout the day was to place his weight upon the lever ends of the big grips that held the trees in place, while the blacks stripped away the fibers. It was precisely what he had been ordered to do at the time he rebelled.

At midday, or thereabouts, a black man appeared with rice cakes. This was the luncheon for the men, and there was also water to drink. After this had been disposed of, with a very brief respite, the work was resumed and continued until nightfall. Then a supper similar to the lunch was provided at the huts.

Crenshawe found himself assigned to a small hut, which he was to occupy by himself. He wondered if his lack of companionship might be due to the gratitude of the Don, for, to tell the truth, he had been rather dreading that he should be compelled to herd with the blacks, and he was more than half inclined to believe that if that should be the case he would be forced to a second rebellion. So it was with a good deal of relief that he threw himself upon the shakedown after supper.

Much as he rebelled in spirit at the general situation, he was thoroughly convinced by the arguments of Edwardes that it would be infinitely better to endure for a time in order to gain vantage ground for effecting his eventual escape.

It was not long before Edwardes came. Crenshawe sat up at once and said:

"Now then, are you ready?"

"That sounds like an energetic Yankee," remarked Edwardes, with a smile. "I presume you have a complete plan for escaping, and are fretting to put it into execution at once."

"That's just about it," Crenshawe returned, "and here's the scheme. I didn't come to this island by my own volition. It's true enough that when I caught sight of it I swam as well as I could towards it, but the important point is that winds and current took me in this direction first. They took more than me here. On the beach I saw plenty of wreckage, some of which doubtless came from the Grand Republic. It seems to me altogether probable that by this time that vessel has broken up, and that the beach along the north of this island must be strewn with timber, planks, and possibly a damaged boat or so. I presume you wouldn't hesitate to trust yourself upon an improvised raft?"

"Not for a minute," said Edwardes emphatically.

"I wonder if I understand you?"

"I mean," said Edwardes, "that if there were such a thing possible as launching the clumsiest kind of a raft, I'd embark on it instantly. No chance would be too slight for me to take if it offered the ghostliest hope of getting away from this horrible place. Think of it, man; there is my family in England——"

Edwardes paused abruptly.

"I understand," said Crenshawe. "There is no need of either of us rehearsing the incentives for trying to escape. Now, what do you think of this plan?"

Edwardes turned his face away and for a considerable period remained silent. At last he said:

"There is little doubt that you would find wreckage on the beach."

"Then let's try it."

"When?"

"Tonight—now."

"It is a little early." Edwardes' voice sank to a whisper. It was perfectly plain that he was deeply affected, almost excited by the project. This manifestation of emotion merely served to make Crenshawe more determined and hopeful.

"We will wait as long as you think best," he said, also speaking in a whisper.

Then for several minutes they talked about the possibility of departing from the cluster of huts unobserved by any of the occupants. Edwardes was certain that no system of guards was maintained in that part of the island. It would simply be necessary to wait an hour or two until the blacks should certainly be asleep; then, with a reasonable degree of safety they could undertake to leave the place and go to the beach where Crenshawe had landed.

The American advised that they take such tools as they could lay their hands on—a hammer and saw, at least, and a quantity of nails. Edwardes, by his greater familiarity with the place and the comparative freedom of movement allowed him, was able to get these articles without attracting suspicion. He also obtained a considerable supply of rice cakes, and a jug of water. All these made a considerable burden, but Crenshawe willingly shouldered the heavier part of it, and some time between ten and eleven o'clock they set forth.

It was a perfectly still, clear night. The moon was full, and after they had left the shadows of the trees which grew near the huts, the plain reaching ahead of them to the seashore was brilliantly illuminated. It would have seemed a natural thing for Edwardes to lead the way, but Crenshawe plunged ahead and set the pace, following the path by which he had come with Tony.

They said little. For himself Crenshawe was too eager, thinking of the possibilities ahead and of what he felt to be the certainty of making a speedy escape to the shore. His belief was that a raft could be rowed from the coast far enough out to sea to be caught by a current, which, if it did not bring them into the track of commerce, would enable them to land upon another island, where the conditions would be more favorable than on the Isle of Night.

The roar of the surf came to them distinctly, louder and louder as they advanced, and at length they were within the line of low foliage that grew thickly on the very border of the beach. Then for the first time Edwardes strode up close to his companion, and they emerged from the thicket side by side.

On the instant they halted, and Crenshawe caught Edwardes by the arm and pointed a little distance down the beach. They saw a pile of wreckage, which might have served for the construction of such a raft as Crenshawe had hoped for. It was not that, however, that had arrested their steps.

Seated upon the wreckage was a man who held something in his arms that caught the gleam of moonlight. It reflected in a long, straight line unmistakably the barrel of a rifle.

Crenshawe turned inquiringly to Edwardes. The Englishman's face in the moonlight was somber, but it did not betray the faintest sense of disappointment or surprise.

"I knew we should find him, sooner or later," he whispered. "It is one of Don Ignacio's guards. I do not think that he ever leaves the coast of this island unpatrolled. I am certain that it is always well guarded after a storm. The man is there to capture or kill any human being who may be driven to the shore."

CHAPTER XV.—DISAPPOINTMENT AND INTERFERENCE.

BEFORE replying Crenshawe stood for a full minute looking at the guard on the wreckage. Then, still holding Edwardes by the arm, he pulled him back into the thicket.

"I don't see why you didn't forewarn me of this," he said.

"Crenshawe," replied the other, "it was mainly because I felt that you must get the conviction of your own eyes that this place is securely guarded from any possible escape. I might have told you, but you wouldn't have believed me. At all events, you wouldn't have felt the force of the situation as you do now."

"No, I don't think I should," admitted Crenshawe gloomily.

"And besides," continued Edwardes, "I was inspired by a great hope when you suggested this device. You are full of energy; you have the American's characteristic resourcefulness, and I thought that possibly where I had failed, both of us might succeed. I have tried this plan, or, rather, one very like it, and have learned that there is no avoiding the Don's guard."

"I am not so sure," muttered Crenshawe darkly. "There is only one man there——"

"And he is armed."

"True, but there are two of us——"

"Against many more than him. Listen, Crenshawe. It is that man's business to shoot to kill if he sees any attempt to escape. The first shot from his rifle would arouse the next man on guard. He would instantly fire his weapon as a warning to others. How far should we get in the construction of a raft before all the forces of the Don would be down upon us?"

"We might creep up and overpower him before he could fire," suggested Crenshawe.

"It would be useless. The guards do some patrolling. Just how systematic I don't pretend to say, but I am positive that two or three times during the night each guard marches up to a spot, where he meets the one who has the next beat, so to speak. We should surely be discovered. For God's sake, old man, don't think that I shall stand forever between you and your plans. I don't mean to throw a wet blanket eternally on your schemes, but you see I know the situation."

"You seem to," growled Crenshawe discontentedly.

"See for yourself, man," exclaimed Edwardes, pointing through the foliage towards the wreckage.

Crenshawe had hardly removed his eyes from that spot while they were talking. He now saw the guard swing himself slowly down from his perch and start up the beach at a leisurely gait. He was coming towards them.

Impelled by the same thought the two men withdrew into the thicket at one side of the rough path. There, although they could not see the guard, they could hear his steps crunching the sand. They heard him come up to the place where the path debouched, where he stood for a moment as if to satisfy himself that nobody had come down. Then he turned away, and they heard his footsteps retreating.

"I will see for myself," said Crenshawe. "Will you wait here?"

"I would rather go with you," Edwardes replied, "for if you find yourself in difficulty or inclined to make any kind of a desperate dash, I want to be in it."

"You shall be," responded Crenshawe. "I will come back if I decide to do anything. I think that I can scout alone better than with a companion."

Edwardes assented and remained where he was, while Crenshawe stole from the thicket and then crept along in its shadow on the beach.

The figure of the guard was clearly silhouetted by the moonlight, not more than one hundred yards away. He was carrying his rifle in the hollow of his arm, evidently wholly unsuspecting that his movements were watched. He proceeded this way perhaps a quarter of a mile, pausing now and again to kick at some light bit of wreckage that the waves tossed up. Eventually he came to a bend in the beach, where he paused, rested the butt of his gun on the sand and waited.

Crenshawe sat down on the sand in order that he might be the more certain that his form should not be distinguishable from the black line of foliage. After a few minutes had passed the guard was joined by another, who came marching from an opposite direction. The second was armed like the first. They exchanged a few words and then separated, each returning the way he had come.

Crenshawe followed his man up to the wreckage, where he had been first discovered and beyond it for another quarter of a mile or more. A third guard was awaiting the first, and there was another pause, and apparently another exchange of observations.

Crenshawe did not wait for the conclusion of the conference. He crept back in the shadow of the thicket to the place where Edwardes awaited him.

"Come on," said the American. "There'll be hard work for both of us tomorrow, and we shall need sleep."

He started off up the path towards the plantation. Edwardes drew a long sigh, but said nothing. It was not his own disappointment and discouragement that affected him. He felt keenly for his energetic friend, to whom these experiences came with all the force of novelty.

When they arrived at the huts again, Edwardes remarked:

"I will replace these tools where I found them. I haven't the heart to say anything more."

"It's all right, Edwardes," responded Crenshawe between his teeth. "You did perfectly right in not forewarning me of what we should find. I see and know the difficulties now, but don't you think for one little second that I am giving it up. This plan was no good, but I shall find another. Good night."

They separated and Crenshawe threw himself upon his shakedown. Active as his mind seemed to be in searching for further plans, it was, nevertheless, but a moment before he was sound asleep. Not so sound, however, that he was not conscious more than once during the night of movement around the hut.

Once he was thoroughly awakened and lay for some minutes listening. He heard nothing that seemed significant and eventually dropped asleep again. How long it was after that, of course, he could not tell, but once again he was broad-awake, and he got up at once and went to the door of the hut. He saw somebody issuing from a hut near by.

"What are you about?" he called sharply.

The man neither replied nor in any other way paid attention to his demand.

"Probably nothing out of the ordinary," thought Crenshawe, and he returned to his rude couch. He was awake again with the first light of day, and he heard a number of voices in the vicinity.

The accents were those of the black slaves, and their words, of course, were gibberish to him. There was something in the tone that appeared to have a meaning of an unusual character. Excitement, resentment, fear—all these seemed to have a part in the conversation. Crenshawe went out and saw that a group of black men were talking earnestly at the door of one of the huts close by. He would have liked to ask them what was the matter, but his ignorance of their language prevented that, and, moreover, as he drew near they scowled at him and separated. Not one of them appeared to be willing to come in the slightest contact with him.

Naturally enough, Crenshawe was filled with wonder, and, to tell the truth, he was a bit apprehensive. There was no guessing what this mysterious behavior portended. He had not long to speculate on it before there was an explanation. The beginning of it was a sharp cry of pain at a little distance. The blacks heard it, and promptly began to hurry away, taking every direction but the one that led to the spot whence the cry issued.

Crenshawe's blood thrilled. There was that in the sound of the voice that betokened the direst agony. Somebody was in peril, or suffering, or both, and not one of the human beings in sight so much as stirred for his relief.

Under such circumstances there could be no hesitation for Crenshawe. He started on the run in the direction whence the cry came, and he speeded his steps still faster when he heard the cry repeated with an intensity of anguish that cut him like a knife.

He had to pass through and around several clumps of trees that had a thick, low growing foliage before he came in view of a scene that fairly caused his heart to leap with the horror of it.

Across a little open space of ground was a small hut similar to the one he himself occupied. Seated in front of the doorway, with an umbrella over his head, was Don Ignacio. He was fanning himself leisurely. In front of the Don, and between him and Crenshawe, therefore, was one of those antiquated instruments of torture known as the rack. It was on the ground and stretched upon it was the almost naked body of Tony.

Two or three blacks stood by awaiting the orders of Josefo to set the bar-

barous instrument tighter, and thus cause the strain upon the boy's limbs to become the more intolerable. It was evident that just at the moment before Crenshawe appeared there had been a pause in the horrid proceedings to enable Josefo, who was exulting in his rôle of inquisitor, to ask a question. Crenshawe heard the answer:

"Don't know. Can't tell."

This was followed by a command to the blacks. In response to this, they applied themselves immediately to the rack. Tony's shrill voice again rent the air, but it had no sooner sounded than the American acted.

It was no time for such a man to be discreet, or consider policy. He was on the dead run when he came in view, and his steps did not slacken as he charged up to the spot full tilt. A black at the corner of the rack was in his way first, and although the fellow was but obeying orders, Crenshawe dealt him a stinging left hand blow that sent him reeling, and leaped down after him to tackle Josefo.

The tackle was short, sharp and decisive. The brutal overseer, intent upon his horrible work, had not realized that an interruption was at hand until the black man let go the rack and fell sprawling upon the ground. Then Josefo turned with a start just in time to receive two ponderous blows, one from Crenshawe's right fist and the other from his left. Both landed on his face, and with hardly more than a gasp the overseer toppled and fell at the feet of Don Ignacio.

"By Heaven!" roared Crenshawe, "this thing has got to stop if I have to murder every white man on the place."

CHAPTER XVI.—CRENSHAWE'S REWARD.

WITHOUT waiting to observe the immediate effect of his attack, Crenshawe whipped his knife from his pocket, and stooping over the rack, cut the thongs that bound Tony to it. This was the work of but an instant, and when the American arose he leaped straight for Don Ignacio.

The latter, as much surprised as Josefo had been, had risen up from his chair and attempted to beat a retreat into the hut. In his trepidation and confusion he stumbled over the chair, thus delaying himself for about as long as it took Crenshawe to release Tony. Therefore, when Crenshawe faced the Don the Spaniard was just backing into the hut.

Wild with rage and feeling that nothing could stay him now, the American leaped after the Spaniard, and came to a halt abruptly at the threshold of the hut. The Don, having gained the interior, had seized a revolver and now confronted Crenshawe with it. The hand that held the weapon shook as with the palsy, and fear glowed in the Spaniard's eyes.

"Stop where you are," he stammered, "or I'll shoot."

Crenshawe looked upon the man with infinite contempt.

"Oh, shoot—shoot, you cowardly coyote," he cried, while he raised both hands in a gesture expressive of the fact that he was unarmed, and that he defied the Spaniard to do his worst.

Hearing a step behind him, he turned about suddenly with his arms still

in the air. Josefo, though half stunned by the American's blows, had picked himself up, and perceiving that his master had Crenshawe covered by a revolver, had thought to creep upon him from behind and overpower, or otherwise injure him. There was no necessity for Crenshawe to fight, although he swung his right arm down with fist clenched. Josefo had dodged aside the instant the American's gesture began. He had no mind for meeting those hard fists a second time.

"Let him alone, Josefo," called the Don, his voice shaking as his hands did.

Crenshawe laughed scornfully, and turning squarely about knelt beside Tony. The lad lay on his side now, breathing heavily and looking upon the scene with staring eyes.

"Are you much hurt, my boy?" asked Crenshawe.

"They kill you," Tony whispered in reply.

"Oh, I guess not."

As he spoke, Crenshawe noticed the blacks who had been working upon the rack. They stood in doubtful attitudes at a little distance, and he caught something unusual in the expression of their faces. There was no mistaking the hate that gleamed in the eyes they directed towards Josefo and the Don, and it seemed to the American as if there were hope dimly shadowed there as they perceived his own resoluteness in balking the iron law of the island.

Those looks caused an idea to flash upon him then and there, but it was no time to act upon it. Josefo had cautiously approached the door of the hut where the Don now stood with his revolver half raised, and cried out:

"Ask him, your excellency, ask him about those crumbs of rice cake in the prison house. How did they get there? Who put them there? He dare not deny that it was this young rascal."

"Tony," whispered Crenshawe, "was it for that they were torturing you?"

"Yes," returned the boy, in a fluttering voice. "Josefo suspected when he saw that you did not grab food the minute he took off the chain. He hunt, he find crumbs. He find how they got there. Last night he go all through huts looking for somebody who have rice cakes and asking questions. I no tell."

Saying this, the boy shut his lips hard together and shook his head.

"I guess I understand," said Crenshawe, "and now if you can walk, you get up and go to your own hut, or to mine, just as you like."

"They won't let me. Don Ignacio shoot when I move. He kill me, if not kill you."

Crenshawe felt no fear for himself. He was not giving his mind time to act on that manner of influence. At the last analysis it might be that he was acting in a kind of desperation that dared death without a thought of its seriousness. At all events it was not any anxiety about himself that caused him to rise and address the Don, but rather fear for Tony.

Meantime the Don and Josefo had been conversing in Spanish. What they said must be left unrecorded, for Crenshawe did not understand a word, but from Josefo's expostulatory tone it was fairly evident that he was protest-

ing against sparing Crenshawe from instant death. It was equally plain that the Don had reasons of his own for not firing that revolver. The weapon was half raised again when Crenshawe stood up, but the latter waved his hand contemptuously towards it, and said:

"There will be time enough to draw on me, Don Ignacio, when I make another charge."

"You had best stand still," returned the Don. "It isn't necessary for me to shoot you. At a word I could bring a hundred faithful slaves who would tear your limbs asunder."

"Why don't you say it then?" snapped the American.

There was a faint suspicion of an oily smile upon the Spaniard's face. A suspicion, merely, for the Don was yet trembling with the excitement of Crenshawe's unexpected attack.

"I prefer to make use of you," he answered.

"And this boy here?" Crenshawe demanded, pointing to Tony.

"He must be punished."

"What has he done to deserve it?"

"You know better than I, Americano. You know who it was that cut through two bamboo poles just beneath the surface of the ground, and then who cut almost through the same posts a few inches higher up. That made it possible to push the almost severed ends in, and through the aperture thus formed to push one cake of rice in after another. Small wonder, Americano, that hunger failed to bring about your submission earlier. There is no other among the slaves but Tony who would have dared to do such a thing, even if he had thought of it. My shrewd Josefo here discovered the whole trick, and I myself have seen the severed bamboo poles which Tony pulled back into place after he had pushed the rice cakes through."

"You have no other evidence," said Crenshawe, "except supposition, have you?"

"I am not in the habit of answering my slaves' questions," returned the Don, "but I am willing to call your attention to the fact that crumbs of rice were found beneath your bed."

"That isn't the point," Crenshawe explained. "I have made submission, and you have me in your power. The point is, that you don't know that this lad was guilty of bringing me assistance."

"We are satisfied of it," said the Don.

"And you mean to punish him?"

"Assuredly, and I warn you that any further interference on your part will cost you bitterly."

For a moment Crenshawe stood as if debating with himself. As a matter of fact, his mind was made up ere this, but he paused for the effect it might produce on the Don.

"Your Excellency," he said presently, speaking in a very mild tone, "I had the good fortune yesterday to perform a little service for you which aroused your gratitude."

At this, the Don's eyes glistened eagerly, and a smile that was almost pleasant came upon his face.

"I remember," he said, nodding energetically, "I remember. It was a brave deed and well done. The bird is sound; but for you he would have been killed, or, at the best, helplessly maimed."

"You promised me a reward," said Crenshawe suggestively.

"Ah, yes, but——"

"May I claim it now?"

The Don's face darkened. "You are hardly in a position to ask a reward," he said, "after this attempt to override my authority."

"I know," said Crenshawe, with an affection of deep humility. "But think of the circumstances, your excellency. Think what my feelings must be for this misguided lad, and my reward would be such a simple matter and one that would make your slaves all the more devoted and faithful. Let the boy go, your excellency; has he not had punishment enough?"

Josefo gave a snarl of rage and began to talk rapidly in Spanish to the Don, but the latter waved him aside, evidently commanding him to be silent. There was a brief pause then, which the Don broke by saying:

"Ordinarily I should think it best to make an example of the boy, but in consideration of your services to me, I will let him go."

That ended the matter. Tony, as soon as he knew that he was free from further danger of torture, got up and hobbled away to his quarters.

Crenshawe passed much the same kind of day that he had before, the only difference of importance being that his overseer on this occasion was not Josefo. It may be that the Don, in his determination to win the American to devoting the best of his abilities to the work, would not venture to bring him again so soon in contact with an overseer, who was evidently destined to arouse all his animosity.

In the evening, Edwardes came to Crenshawe's hut.

"I have hit upon the right plan at last," said Crenshawe quietly.

"Good," exclaimed Edwardes in a low voice. "I almost believe before you name it that it will be practicable. What is it?"

"We will incite an insurrection among the slaves, overpower the Don and all his white subordinates, take possession of the island, and so be ready to capture the first of the Don's boats that comes here for merchandise or any other purpose."

CHAPTER XVII.—THE DON'S IDEAS.

"THAT is a good plan," said Edwardes slowly, and then his words came more quickly, and his eyes gleamed with rising excitement, as he added, "Especially as one of the Don's boats is now in port. She came in today loaded with ice."

"Ice!" exclaimed Crenshawe.

"Yes. I saw the men at work transferring the cargo to an ice house which is just beyond the mansion. Oh, you've no idea of it, Crenshawe, but Don Ignacio lives here like a sybarite."

"He has all the luxuries then?"

"All in the world."

"How long will that boat stay in port?"

"Three or four days at least."

"Where is the port?"

"On the southern coast of the island; in other words, directly across from the place where you were driven ashore."

"That part of the island I suppose is more strongly guarded than the northern coast?"

"Indeed it is, but once overcome the Don and Josefo, and it will not be so difficult a thing to get at the guards. The crew of the vessel may be another matter——"

"We can take care of the crew, if once we get at the Don. Strike at the head of the institution here, and the limbs will fall easily."

Crenshawe spoke with great confidence, and Edwardes, too, for the first time since they had met, appeared to have hope in the success of the American's plans. Their conversation had been conducted in whispers thus far, not from any necessity of it, but because both felt the tense strain that comes from discussing a matter of vital importance.

They discussed it further, taking into account the probable attitude of most of the slaves as well as methods for conducting their campaign. For once Edwardes had no wet blanket to throw upon the enterprise. If he frowned upon a suggestion of his comrade, it was merely to improve it with another. To both of them it seemed that nothing could be gained by delaying operations. It might take a little time to agitate the matter among the slaves, but certainly all must be accomplished before the departure of the ice laden ship, for there was no telling how soon another of the Don's vessels would come to port.

The matter of agitation presented a bit of difficulty, for Crenshawe was unfamiliar with either Spanish or the language of the blacks. Edwardes was at home sufficiently in both, but it would have been much better if the two men could have gone to different blacks and suggested the plan independently.

Edwardes suggested that it would be well to bring Tony into the scheme early, in order to make use of his linguistic attainments, for the lad certainly knew as much Spanish as he did English, and was, of course, familiar with the black dialect. There was another slave on the island who had picked up a bit of English, and this man, a powerful negro, seemed to have certain capacities for leadership. His quarters were at a distance, and Edwardes decided that he would go and bring him to Crenshawe's hut, while Crenshawe went to get Tony.

Accordingly they separated. It was then quite dark, although the evening was not far advanced. Crenshawe found Tony in conversation with two or three slaves, who evidently had been doing what they could to ease him from the sufferings induced by his experience on the rack.

It was some time before the other blacks departed, and until they had gone Crenshawe did not venture to state his errand to the boy. When he did so, Tony's eyes lighted with joy.

"Good—good," he said over and over again. "The black men all hate Don Ignacio. All hate Josefo to kill."

He uttered these last words with a fierce vim that sent a thrill through Crenshawe's blood.

"It may not be necessary, Tony," said the American cautiously, "to do any killing. All we want, you understand, is to get possession of the Don. With him and Josefo in our power, we hope it won't be necessary to kill anybody."

Tony nodded, but whether he fully understood or not was problematical.

"There are no black men, are there," asked Crenshawe, "who would be faithful to the Spaniard if there was a chance that they might be free?"

"No, no!" cried Tony. "All fight. All be free. All hate Don and Josefo."

"Well, then," said Crenshawe doubtfully, for there was something in the lad's earnestness that gave him an indefinable fear of the event, "come up to my place, and we will talk it over with Edwardes. You are a friend of Edwardes, I believe, Tony?"

"Die for Edwardes," responded Tony simply. "Me suppose you friend of Edwardes, for you white, so I put rice cakes in your prison."

"You made no mistake there, young man. Now let's come on if you can walk after that experience of yours this morning."

"Oh, me walk; limp little, that's all."

Together they returned to Crenshawe's hut. They found a black man waiting for them there, but Edwardes was not in sight. Tony addressed the man as Maloa. It was he to whom Edwardes had referred as the black who showed the qualities of leadership.

"Did Edwardes bring you here?" asked Crenshawe.

Maloa looked inquiringly at Crenshawe for a moment and then turned to Tony.

"Speak to him in your own lingo, Tony," said the American, "and ask him if he came from Edwardes."

Question and answer having followed in incomprehensible dialect, Crenshawe became satisfied that the black had come from Edwardes, and the next inquiry was as to Edwardes' present whereabouts. Maloa did not know, but he thought that Edwardes had left him while on the way to the hut to go toward the mansion.

It struck Crenshawe as rather odd and possibly significant, so he left both the blacks in his hut with instructions to remain there until he returned, and started in the direction of the park.

It was thus that in his own mind he always referred to the wealth of shrubbery that grew a little distance inland from the quarters occupied by the slaves. As Don Ignacio had frequently taken that direction and Crenshawe had once seen a part of a roof there, he had no doubt the slaver's dwelling was in that part of the island.

A few paces away from the huts and Crenshawe was upon open ground. No trees or shrubbery intervened between him and the borders of the park. The moon had not yet risen, and, therefore, he could see nothing ahead of him but the black mass of trees in the direction of the mansion. As he approached closer he heard two voices in conversation. He could not distin-

guish the words, but he recognized the tones. Don Ignacio and Josefo were talking together.

Hoping that they might be conversing in English, and wishing to hear what they were saying, Crenshawe advanced cautiously until he was almost under a tree a little beyond which the two were sitting. It was not until then that he made certain that the two were talking in Spanish, and he would have turned about, but at the same instant he distinguished a darker object against the gloom of the foliage, and realized that an eavesdropper was ahead of him. Apparently the eavesdropper had observed the approach of Crenshawe, for he waved his arm, as if beckoning. Crenshawe went close and presently stood beside Edwardes.

The Don and his overseer were talking very earnestly, there could be no mistaking that, and Crenshawe was wild with exasperation because he could not understand a word. Presently Edwardes took him by the arm and led him away. Both walked with the utmost care, that their feet should make no noise to attract the attention of the talkers.

"Why didn't you hear it out?" whispered Crenshawe, when they had gone to a little distance.

"I heard enough," Edwardes replied.

"Was it about us?"

"You have guessed it, though possibly you may have heard our names mentioned."

"No, I couldn't catch a word, but I suspected that we might be the subject of their talk. You see I have thought so hard about this insurrection that I half suspect some knowledge of it may have got through the air to the Don."

"You can dismiss any fear of that kind," said Edwardes. "I was returning with Maloa when I heard their voices, and having caught the mention of my own name, I decided that it would be just as well to hear what they had to say. So I sent Maloa on to your hut and crept in there where you found me."

"Well?" said Crenshawe interrogatively.

"I heard ourselves pretty thoroughly discussed. Josefo, who, as the Don's chief overseer since this horrible institution was set up on the island, has the privilege of speaking pretty freely, was trying to persuade the Don that it would be the part of good policy to put you and me to death."

"Clever fellow, Josefo."

"Not so clever as the Don, though. The old brute has a spark of wisdom. Briefly, his idea is that the time may come when search will be made for you, or me, or both of us. With all his guarding of the island he cannot be positive that some day somebody will not get away. As long as we are alive he believes that it will be possible to hoodwink any inquirers into believing that we are well cared for."

"What nonsense."

"That is only one of his arguments, but it demonstrated that he is afraid to put us to death. He is, however, as determined as Josefo is that we shall be kept in utter subjection. He tells his overseer that he is convinced that when once the American has grown accustomed to the system, he will exert his Yankee ingenuity to its advantage. 'There are a

good many things,' says the Don, 'which could be improved on here, and I count on the American as a clever man to put such things in more effective shape. He comes of a nation of money grabbers, and in the long run I shall be able to arouse his cupidity by promising him money rewards for what he does for me.' "

"Generous," exclaimed Crenshawe.

"He wasn't so complimentary in his reference to me," continued Edwardes. "About all he seems to think I am worth is my value for a possible ransom."

"And he doesn't suspect that we are up to anything?"

"As I have said before, that doesn't trouble him much, for he has sufficient faith in the efficacy of his guards to believe that any deliberate attempt at escape would be foiled."

They had now arrived again at Crenshawe's hut, where Tony and Maloa were awaiting them. Till far into the night these four discussed the insurrection and laid careful plans for sowing its seeds on the morrow.

CHAPTER XVIII.—SOWING THE SEEDS.

IN the course of the discussion it was developed for Crenshawe's information that one feature of the Don's administration consisted in a careful accounting for all firearms on the island. Every guard was required to present himself at a building a little removed from the mansion at the end of his period of duty. At that time he not only had to make a report of his observations to an overseer who had charge of the military operations, so to speak, but give up his weapon as well.

This made it quite clear that there were no firearms on the island that could be used in behalf of the insurrection, unless this building could be captured. Moreover, Maloa declared that there were guards among the blacks who would prove to be faithful to Don Ignacio. In his opinion it was not so much that they respected the Don, or had any real feeling of loyalty towards him, as that they feared him. His despotic rule had prevailed for so long that the spirit of most of the blacks appeared to be broken; and the guards generally believed that the man could not be overcome.

For these reasons, the conspirators decided that it would be best to direct their campaign against the magazine, though, preliminary to that, it would undoubtedly be necessary to capture the Don himself. That did not promise to be a difficult matter, for he wandered about the island freely, and at almost any time he might become the victim of a well planned assault by two men.

Two would be essential to the attack, for at most times the Don was accompanied by a body servant, who might make some show of resistance. It was thought, however, that with a day or two for agitating the idea, the loyalty of body servants as well as field hands might be undermined, so that when the stroke should be given it would fall with such force as to be substantially irresistible. With the Don once in their power and chained to the stone post—for thus Crenshawe determined that he would have it—the conspirators believed that an attack upon the magazine could successfully be

made with no other weapons than the tools used by the slaves in their ordinary labors.

Really, it all looked easy. When the four separated that night it is doubtful if one of them had the slightest doubt that within a few days he would be at liberty. So, at all events, it was with Crenshawe. Whereas he had been able to sleep soundly when his mind was beset with apparently unsolvable problems, he was now so excited by confident hope that it was well towards morning before slumber came upon him.

All through the next day he was in a fever of exasperation because of his inability to promote the uprising. He could not say a word in the language that the blacks understood, and he could not help a profound anxiety lest his three comrades were not utilizing their opportunities to the utmost.

There was a little relief from this oppressing feeling towards the middle of the afternoon. Tony found some excuse or other for strolling over to the gang in which Crenshawe was at work, and he had not been there long before the American observed that one and another of the blacks turned their eyes eagerly towards him.

"Mischief is afoot," he thought triumphantly, and whenever he caught a black man's eye he nodded encouragingly.

Tony said nothing to him on that occasion, and Crenshawe regarded the boy's silence as a bit of well timed shrewdness. Nevertheless, he was so eager to know how the affair was moving that he almost wished the lad had risked arousing suspicion in the mind of the overseer by making a report. In this, too, he was destined to have relief before the day was over, for Edwardes made opportunity to leave his work and come up to his friend.

"It is going well," said Edwardes quietly. "The blacks are ripe for revolt, and on my word it looks as if the only danger is their great eagerness to overwhelm the Don. We must hold them in check if we want to succeed."

"Well, they understand, don't they," asked Crenshawe, "that you and I are to be their leaders in this?"

"The idea is put before them on that basis."

"Well, if they grasp the idea, can't we trust them to await our commands?"

"Oh, I think so. I am not worrying. You can judge for yourself what their temper is tonight."

The night came at last, and with it a meeting of the conspirators, and a considerable number of the blacks, who had been approached. This was held at the border of a grove about a mile from the mansion towards the east. A mile or so further on was the seacoast, and between them and the mansion were no buildings save the huts occupied by the slaves themselves. Therefore, they were secure from interruption.

As the assembling was not until late at night, the moon had risen and gave sufficient light for them to distinguish one another. Crenshawe believed that he was calm when he approached the place and saw fifty or more black men awaiting him. His outward appearance certainly was that of confident mastery. But his heart beat high, in sympathy, doubtless, with the general atmosphere of intense excitement that prevailed.

For once the dull indifferent faces of the blacks were alive with interest. They looked eagerly, expectantly, at Crenshawe and Edwardes, saying little or nothing, but evincing by attitude and expression their entire readiness to risk lives, now that they had found leaders, in a grand assault for freedom.

Edwardes went about among them, talking informally. Whenever he paused, a group of a dozen or more pressed close around him and drank in his every word. Crenshawe could feel the excitement rising. It was terribly patent that here was a force for destruction that could be triumphantly effective, if only it could be directed wisely.

He could not doubt the wisdom of the plan, for it was largely his own. There was to be the capture of the *Don* after his evening meal on the following day. This was to be accomplished while he was sitting under his favorite tree at a little distance from the mansion, and screened from view of its doorways and windows by the foliage of trees upon his lawn. Once captured, the *Don* was to be taken to the prison house and tied to the stone post. The slaves were to be massed there, ready to charge upon the magazine, armed with hooks, scythes, hammers, and such other implements as Edwardes could find for them.

With the capture of the magazine, there would be arms enough for the more discreet among them to go out and drive in the guards one after the other. Then an assault was to be made upon the port. An effort would precede it in the way of inducing the captain of the *Don's* vessel to surrender. The situation would be explained to him in a military sense, and if he did not surrender the consequences would be upon his own head.

"These fellows are like a powder magazine," said Edwardes, turning from a group to Crenshawe.

"Are they anxious to make the attack tonight?"

"They'd start now if we gave the word."

The Englishman spoke seriously, and when Crenshawe looked significantly at him, he set his jaws hard together and turned to another group.

The fear of their own engine was eating its way into the hearts of the white leaders.

Elsewhere in the crowd Crenshawe saw that Tony and Maloa were talking with their comrades and undoubtedly laying before them the details of the campaign. It was a quiet meeting. The moon glinted down through the foliage upon dusky faces that seemed to be set in expressions of patient determination. There were no cries, no curses, no savage mutterings, but mingled with the small sounds of the forest there was only the dull murmur of the slaves' voices, as they asked questions, and now and again the clear, incisive accents of the Englishman outlining the plan.

As he rubbed up against one and another of the slaves, Crenshawe imagined that he could feel their muscles grow tense, and now and again there seemed to pass a shiver over the entire assembly, as if it were one black monster straining in the leash and eager to be off. But Crenshawe, unable to talk with them, himself nerved to the highest, was excitable, not to say emotional. If he could have spoken and so relieved his feelings, he might not have been so sensitive to these slight manifestations of interest on the part of his dark allies.

"Black man down by grove."

"Where we were last night?" asked Crenshawe.

"Yes, come up quick."

"Are they on the way now?"

"Yes——"

Crenshawe hurried faster. He was making towards the park, and in half a minute he burst through a row of bushes and came upon the Don placidly smoking cigarettes under his favorite tree.

"Up, man!" he cried tempestuously. "The slaves have arisen and are going to attack the magazine."

The Spaniard's swarthy face grew ashen. The cigarette dropped from his fingers, and his limbs shook as if he were palsied. He tried to speak, but his voice stuck in his throat.

"Do you not hear?" cried Edwardes, addressing him in Spanish. "The slaves are on the way now to attack the magazine and murder you and every white man on the place."

A tear welled up from each of the Don's wicked eyes and coursed down his pallid cheeks.

"It has always been my nightmare," he sobbed, "my one great fear, and at last it has come."

"Oh, you coward," roared Crenshawe, dashing off across the lawn. "Which way is the magazine, Edwardes?" he shouted back.

Edwardes joined him in a moment and led him around a very large mansion to a small building in the rear. Crenshawe took little note of the objects that they passed. There was no time for it, although he kept his senses keenly alert for any place that should offer good possibilities for defense.

Seated at a little distance from the doorway of the magazine was a white overseer, whom Crenshawe had never seen. He also was occupied in idly smoking cigarettes.

"Give us weapons," began Crenshawe.

"He don't understand a word of English," interrupted Edwardes, and he at once spoke to the man in Spanish.

The overseer leaped as if he had been shot. His eyes blazed, and without asking for or waiting for a word of explanation he ran into the magazine. Edwardes and Crenshawe followed him, and in another moment were taking revolvers and rifles from racks.

Tony came rushing in while they were thus engaged, and he, too, was armed. The men had just succeeded in taking all the weapons each could carry, when they heard the report of a rifle at no great distance, followed by a prolonged howl of many voices. Edwardes looked out of the magazine door.

"I can see them," he exclaimed; "they have come as far as the huts."

Just then Don Ignacio came tottering up.

"They have killed Josefo," he gasped, and sank in a helpless heap on the floor.

The howling of the savages continued and drew nearer.

"How many of them do you suppose are armed?" asked Crenshawe.

"Three guards," answered Tony.

"We shall beat them, then."

Crenshawe stood in the doorway looking the place over. The ornamental shrubbery that beautified the Don's grounds extended here at the back of the mansion, though it was not as luxuriant as it was up at the front.

"There are four of us," said Crenshawe quickly, addressing Edwardes. "Tell the overseer that we will post ourselves behind bushes out there—one at each. Come what may, we must pick off the armed guards."

"We'll do it," responded Edwardes, "but the fellows will be so impelled by frenzy that I fear a mere handful of fatalities on their side will not count to deter them."

"The armed guards must be killed," returned Crenshawe, "and as for the rest, there is a way to stop them. This cowardly hulk here must help." He pointed to Don Ignacio.

"They will kill me," moaned the Don.

"It would serve you right, but you have got to save us." Saying which Crenshawe seized the Spaniard by his collar and jerked him to his feet.

Edwardes, the overseer, and Tony, were betaking themselves to the bushes, whence they were to fire upon the attacking party. Crenshawe dragged the Don—literally dragged him, for he had not the nerve to move his limbs—to his own post. The blacks were then hardly more than a hundred yards away. At their head were three with rifles.

"I'll take the middle one," called Crenshawe, and fired as he spoke.

The middle guard staggered and fell upon his face.

Three other shots spoke from neighboring bushes, and another guard went down. Crenshawe himself finished the third one.

The effect of the little fusillade was to cause the advancing blacks to waver for an instant and almost to halt. Those in the rear, unable to perceive the fatal character of the defense, were howling excitedly and pushing the others on.

"Now then, you trembling coward," said Crenshawe to the Don, "it's your turn. Take this revolver and point it at the blacks. You don't need to fire."

The Don stammered something unintelligible, but his hand gripped the revolver that Crenshawe gave him. The American pushed him from beside the bush so that he stood in full view of the blacks.

Seeing him, a long drawn howl of dismay went up from all their throats. It instantly appeared to them, as Crenshawe had hoped it would, that he, the all powerful tyrant of their lives, had been the sole cause of slaughter in their ranks. As with one accord they threw down the rude weapons with which they had armed themselves, and groveled in the dirt before that hated but awful vision of impregnable power.

The insurrection was quelled.

CHAPTER XX.—THE SPANISH GUNBOAT.

THE sight of the groveling slaves reanimated the Don. The pallor of cowardly fear left his face, and the savage expression of the tyrant returned.

"It is well over," he cried; "I will have every one of them put to the torture so severely that never again will such an attempt to break my authority be made. You have done well, *Americano*, and you also, *Inglese*. I shall not forget it."

Just then two other white overseers, who had been attracted by the sound of firing, came running up. The Don turned to them and began to give them instructions about driving the mutinous blacks to their quarters and binding them to await his pleasure.

Meantime Edwardes had drawn near Crenshawe.

"We have saved ourselves from slaughter," said the Englishman, "but you see how it is, even this bold plan for our escape has failed. We are as much in the Don's power as ever."

"We are," returned Crenshawe hurriedly, "if we do not take advantage of the situation."

"But how——"

"Listen to what I tell the Don, and translate it to the overseers."

With this Crenshawe dashed up to the Don and with an appearance of excitement that was not wholly fictitious, he cried:

"The danger is not passed, your excellency. This is but a part of a concerted attack. Tony warned us of this, and he tells us that a hundred or more are now on their way across the island, expecting to join their comrades in the assault. They may be here any moment."

The Don looked intensely startled, and the pallor began to creep back upon his swarthy cheeks, but he did not yield to fright so far as before, for the speedy victory that had been gained encouraged him.

"We shall defeat them," continued Crenshawe, "but there is only one way to do it." Without waiting for the Don to make an inquiry, he went on rapidly: "We will meet them as we met the others. Some of us will go this way, the others that; station ourselves behind bushes and drop the armed guards the moment they come in sight. Come on, men. There is not a second to be lost."

"Yes, yes," stammered the Don. "Go meet them and don't let them come as far as this."

"They will have to come over our dead bodies if they do," shouted Crenshawe.

Then he turned to Edwardes and said:

"Leave one or two of the overseers to guard the Don if you like, but send the others off towards the northwest. We will take a direction a little to the south, and thus try to get the rebels between two fires."

Edwardes, although he did not wholly comprehend the American's move, translated the command, and two of the overseers immediately set off in the direction suggested. Hardly waiting to see whether they did so or not, Crenshawe took Tony by the arm, and, followed by Edwardes, set off at top speed around the mansion, and made in a general direction for the port. Edwardes caught up with him presently, and Crenshawe exclaimed:

"There are only three of us, to be sure, but we have got to make a desperate effort to capture the Don's vessel. If we don't succeed—but there

mustn't be any if; it's our only chance for escape. You know the way, and as soon as we are anywhere near the harbor let me know so that we can proceed cautiously."

The words had hardly been uttered when both men caught sight of an advancing party about two hundred yards away. The dusk of evening was already on, and it was impossible at that distance to distinguish the nature of the party, but it was perfectly clear that one carried a rifle.

He and his companions were just emerging from a grove, and there was no telling how many there might be behind them.

"Heavens and earth!" exclaimed Edwardes, "what you told the Don must have been true. The blacks certainly have organized a general insurrection, and there comes the party that you pretended we were going out to attack."

"It looks so," muttered Crenshawe. They had halted, and, following his example were lying flat upon the ground. "Like the others," continued Crenshawe, "they have induced at least one guard to join them, and that is the fellow with the rifle, I suppose."

"Shall we shoot?"

"No; let's take the chance that they will pass us and go on to the mansion. We don't care now what they do there. After they have gone by——"

"No blacks there," exclaimed Tony suddenly.

Both the whites looked more sharply at the advancing party. It did seem as if the boy were right. The men were not dressed in the rude costume worn by the slaves, and their motions were different. They were coming slowly, too, and apparently the entire party consisted of no more than half a dozen.

"Perhaps," whispered Crenshawe, "they are the crew of the Don's vessel. They may have heard the firing, and are on the way to see what is the matter."

"No," returned Edwardes, "the harbor is so far off that the sound of firing could not be heard there."

For a few seconds after this, the three watched eagerly. Then suddenly Crenshawe rose with a shout and ran directly towards the party, waving his hat as he went. His companions followed, overwhelmed with surprise to see him meet the leader of the company and shake hands with him. Crenshawe repeated this operation with every member of the party, and was talking eagerly with them when Tony and Edwardes came up.

"They are survivors of the Grand Republic," cried Crenshawe joyously. "This," indicating the man with the rifle, "is the bos'n and the others are members of the crew. Tell me, boys, how did you get to shore and how long have you been here?"

"We made land about three hours ago," returned the boatswain, "after knocking about on a life raft from the time the ship went down. We were just on our way inland to see if we could come to some settlement. A black ruffian met us on the beach——" The fellow paused, glanced doubtfully at the rifle he carried, and then at the weapons carried by Crenshawe and his two companions. "You seem to be armed to the teeth, Mr. Crenshawe," he concluded.

"You needn't hesitate to tell us what your adventure was on the beach,"

said Crenshawe. "It can't be counted against anybody if he has put up a fight against the people who live here."

"Well, that's about what it was," the boatswain responded. "The black ruffian came down to us and wasn't for letting us land at all. It was so darned evident that he meant no good to us, that while I was trying to parley with him a couple of the boys crept up behind, threw him down and pretty nigh choked the life out of him. We left him where we found him, tied hand and foot."

"I wish you had gagged him," said Crenshawe, "for his cries may arouse the other guards. But no matter. Bos'n, if we are to get away from this place alive we have got to make a fight for it now. I know you'll join us. I guess we have got revolvers enough to allow each man a weapon. Here you, Tony and Edwardes, divvy up the guns."

Without stopping for any further explanation, Crenshawe saw that weapons were distributed to the sailors, and then started off again on the run towards the harbor. They had made but a little distance when again there was a halt on account of sighting an approaching party. Crenshawe withdrew his men into a grove and waited until the party had passed.

It was too dark to distinguish them, further than to be certain that they were white men. There were four of them together. Supposing that they were a part of the crew of the Don's vessel, and rejoicing that they had so many the less to contend with, the fugitives hastened on.

It was fully half an hour before they arrived at the summit of a low hill and saw the harbor at its base. In the darkness, Crenshawe could barely make out the outlines of a storehouse built upon a pier that extended possibly two hundred feet into the bay. A single light beside it he judged correctly to be a lantern hung in the shrouds of the vessel.

From that time, the fugitives advanced cautiously. They could neither see nor hear anybody stirring about the pier, but when they arrived within a short distance of it, they heard a low hissing, which Crenshawe promptly recognized as steam escaping from an engine.

"Has the Don a steam engine here?" he whispered to Edwardes.

The Englishman shook his head.

"Then," said Crenshawe, "there are two boats here, and one of them is a steamer. That's the one we want to capture."

"The steamer seems to be lying clear out at the end of the pier, Mr. Crenshawe," said the boatswain.

Crenshawe nodded, and after considering the situation for a moment, left his men where they were and went ahead to reconnoiter.

He found that the storehouse on the pier covered its entire breadth, with the exception of a narrow passage along the stringpiece on either side. He went cautiously along this passage on the side opposite to where the sailing vessel lay, until, when he was near the end, he could see the prow of the steamer. Apparently it was little more than a tug.

While he was wondering whether he dared go further, a light appeared upon the steamer. It was a tiny flame, and all it revealed was the face of a man who held it while he applied it to a cigarette. There was just the sugges-

tion of a cap above the face. The match was blown out, and the only light left was the tiny spark which glowed as the smoker puffed away contentedly.

Crenshawe got down on all fours and crept on further. He was presently near enough to make out several objects on the forward deck of the steamer, and after his inspection had satisfied him he returned to his companions.

"Boys," he said, "that steamer is a Spanish gunboat. There is one officer on duty. The others may be the men whom we saw going towards the mansion, and there are doubtless several of the crew on board. We will make a rush altogether and capture her."

"What," gasped the boatswain, "capture a government vessel?"

"We have got to do it," said Crenshawe. "Nothing can be worse than staying here. Bos'n, have a couple of your men ready to cast off the lines, while the rest of us board the craft, overpower the officer, and get control of the engine."

The boatswain needed a little persuasion to induce him to take a hand in this venture, and a few minutes therefore had to be spent in explaining to him the situation. Once he and his comrades understood it, they were as willing to make this bold dash for liberty as were Crenshawe and Edwardes.

Led by the American, the entire party reached the stringpiece on the pier opposite the sailing vessel without being observed, and then they went as noiselessly as possible down the narrow walk to the end of the wharf.

The spark glowing at the end of a cigarette showed them that the officer was still on the forward deck, wholly unsuspecting of impending attack. He was not aware that anybody was on the pier until the attacking party had come to the very end. Then he stood up and remarked in Spanish:

"You have returned early, señor."

"Now, boys, cast off in a hurry," exclaimed Crenshawe, leaping across the short space that intervened between the pier end and the steamer's deck.

The Spanish officer, perceiving something hostile in this movement, attempted to draw his sword. At the same time he began to shout a command, but also at the same time Crenshawe's hand closed over his mouth, so that no intelligible word was uttered before he was borne to the deck.

"Find a rope, Tony, and tie this man's legs together."

Edwardes, seeing that Crenshawe was wholly equal to the task he had undertaken, leaped to the wheelhouse. Nobody was in it. The Englishman promptly reached for the signal to the engine room and pulled it. He gave what an English engineer would understand as the signal to go ahead, hoping that the man in the engine room of this craft would so comprehend it.

Meantime there was a great clattering of steps over the deck of the boat, and a moment or two in which there were the sounds of excited voices. Then one of the American sailors put his head in at the wheelhouse.

"If you are all ready, sir," he said, "the bos'n has charge of the engine room, and he says with his compliments, sir, that he will have the machinery started."

"Tell him he can't be too soon about it," returned Edwardes.

The sailor withdrew, and the next moment Crenshawe appeared. "I have got the officer fixed," he said, "so he can't move."

Just then the boat began to vibrate, showing that the starting lever in the engine room had been pulled. Edwardes threw the wheel over and exclaimed:

"Better go down to the engine room, Crenshawe, and see how the bos'n is getting on."

As Crenshawe left on this errand, three or four men came running along the end of the pier. Evidently they were from the sailing vessel and were in much wonderment at the sudden departure of the steamer. They made no attempt to interfere, being unarmed, for the little steamer was already further from the pier than a man could jump.

Crenshawe took in the situation on board the gunboat with a good deal of satisfaction. He saw that the sailors had overcome such members of the crew as they found, driven them into the cabin, and were holding them there at the muzzle of rifles and revolvers. Seated on the steps leading into the engine room he found the boatswain pointing his revolver at the engineer.

Taking one of the sailors with him, Crenshawe made a tour of inspection, in the course of which he examined every part of the boat, with a view to routing out any of the crew who might have escaped the sailors. It proved that the capture had been complete, and there was nothing to do, therefore, but to compel the engineer and the stokers to keep at work, and to guide the vessel as best they could through the darkness and across an unknown sea.

When the harbor was cleared, a new distribution of duties was made. The boatswain, as the only approach to a skilled navigator they had, was put in charge of the wheel. Two sailors were placed in the engine companionway, with instructions to shoot if engineer or stokers showed any signs of relaxing in their work. Crenshawe and Edwardes took turns in patrolling the vessel and seeing that everything was going as it should.

After a short consultation, the boatswain was instructed to make for Manila. Not one in the party could guess what dire penalty would follow the capture of a Spanish gunboat, and it was deemed advisable to make no bones of the matter, but sail straight into Manila harbor and surrender themselves to the Spanish authorities with a true statement of what had happened.

"The American and British consuls," said Edwardes, "will see to it that we get fair play at least."

It was nearly noon of the following day when the steamer entered the channel of Manila Bay and passed Corregidor Island.

"By the way, Crenshawe," said Edwardes, "have you any idea what day of the year it is?"

"Yes," was the reply; "I have managed to keep my count, though if I had been twelve months on the Isle of Night it is likely I would be mixed. I do know, though, that this is the first of May. Hello, what's that?"

Across the water came a succession of dull booms.

"The forts must be firing a salute," suggested Edwardes.

"It sounds too continuous for a salute," said Crenshawe, "but it is cannon, and a good many of them, too. Isn't that smoke that is rising?" He pointed to a cloud visible beyond the eastern end of Corregidor.

"It sounds as if they were having a hot time at Manila," remarked Edwardes.

And a hot time it was, as all the world knows now. The fugitives came in sight of Cavite just in time to witness the finish of Dewey's great battle.

In comparison with the overwhelming interest and the glory of Dewey's achievement upon that day, their adventure pales to insignificance. Therefore they can be dropped from further consideration with the mere statement that before the end of the day their boat was added to the list of Dewey's captures, and when the war has wrought all its results in the Philippines, there is little doubt that the affairs of the Isle of Night will be taken severely in hand by authorities who will not wink at Don Ignacio's iniquitous system.

THE END.

PRESS SONG.

THEY whirl and clash, through the nights and days,
 The magical looms of thought;
 And in and out, through a thousand ways,
 The flashing threads are brought.
 Their swift purveyors part and meet,
 On rail and ship, on mart and street,
 With tireless brain, with hurrying feet,
 As the endless web is wrought.

They may not pause when the sun is high,
 Nor rest when the light is low;
 For while men live, and act, and die,
 The word flies to and fro.
 It leaps the sea, it spans the plain;
 On throbbing wire and mighty chain,
 It runs like fire from main to main,
 That the world may see and know.

While all men sleep, they whirl and clash,
 The terrible looms of light;
 On eyes that wake shall the message flash,
 From far beyond the night;
 And songs in the under world begun
 Shall touch our lips ere day is done;
 For space is nought, and the earth's at one,
 Linked by the word's swift flight.

Man calls to man, and not in vain,
 The cry to his ear is brought;
 All love, and labor, and hope, and pain
 Into each soul is wrought.
 Work on, ye presses, at life's behest,
 For light far spread, and for wrong redressed;
 Till time is ended, ye may not rest,
 Ye marvelous looms of thought!

Marion Couthouy Smith.

A DASH FOR A THRONE.*

BY ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT.

Author of "By Right of Sword."

Being the recital of the many striking adventures that befell a man who died to one identity and entered upon another wherein he was called upon to assume still a third—How he became entangled in an intrigue whose goal was the throne of a kingdom, and the part he played in the plotting.

CHAPTER I.—MY DEATH.

"TO a man who has been dead nearly five years everything would be forgiven, probably—except his resurrection."

This half cynical thought was suggested by the extraordinary change which a few hours of one memorable July day had wrought in my circumstances and position.

As the thought occurred to me I was standing in the library of Gramberg Castle, my hands plunged deep in my pockets, deliberately dallying with my fate as I watched the black dress of the prince's beautiful daughter moving slowly among the gaily colored flower beds in the warm sunshine, like a soothing shadow in the brilliant glare.

I was face to face with a temptation which I found infinitely alluring and immeasurably difficult to resist.

For five years I had been enduring an existence of monotonous emptiness that depressed me till my heart ached and my spirit wearied; and now a chance of change had been thrust upon me all against my seeking, at which my pulses were beating high with the bound of hope; my blood running once again with the old quick tingling of excitement, and through the reopened portals of a life akin to that from which I had been thrust, desire, ambition, pleasure, hazard, were all beckoning to me with fascinating invitation.

I turned from the window and threw myself into a deep easy chair to think.

Five years before I had passed in a moment from a position of royal favor, with limitless ambition and opportunities, to one where death was avowedly the only alternative.

And no one had recognized this more readily than I myself.

I am half English by birth. My mother was an Englishwoman, and went to the Prussian court in the small suite of the bride whom "Unser Fritz" carried from England. My father rose very high in royal favor, and as a consequence I was thrown early in life into the company of the young princes. We grew up close and intimate companions; and when I chose the navy for my profession, every facility was employed to insure my advancement.

I had been about five years in the navy and was already a flag lieutenant

when the smash came. Happily, before that misfortune, my father and mother were both dead.

We were not puritans in those days, and there were some wild times. The last of these in which I took a part finished up on the imperial yacht; and a wild enough time it was.

I had drunk much more freely than the rest—there were only some half dozen of us altogether—and then being a quarrelsome, hot headed fool, I took fire at some words that fell from the prince, and gave him the lie direct.

Exactly what happened I don't clearly remember; but I know that he flung his wine right at my face, and I, forgetting entirely that he was at once my future emperor and my commanding officer, clenched my fist and struck him a violent blow in the face, which knocked him down.

He hit his head in falling and lay still as death.

We thought at first he was dead.

What followed can be imagined. I cannot describe it.

It sobered the lot of us; and our relief when we found he was not dead, but only stunned, cannot be put in words.

He was lifted up and laid on the table, his face all ghastly gray white, save for the mark of my blow on the cheek, a sight I shall never forget.

When the doctor came we told him the prince had had an ugly fall, and as soon as he showed signs of coming round, I left and went off to my ship, in a condition of pitiable consternation and remorse.

I nearly shot myself that night. I took out the revolver twice, and laid it between my teeth, and was only stopped by the consideration that if I did it my suicide would be connected with the affair, and some garbled account of the brawl and of what was behind it, would leak out.

The next day old Count von Augener, who had been telegraphed for, came to my cabin. He hated me, as he had hated my father, and I knew it.

The interview was brief enough, and he sounded the keynote in the sentence with which he opened it.

"You are still alive, lieutenant?" he said, bending on me a piercing look from under his shaggy, beetling brows.

"Say what you have to say, and be good enough to keep from taunts," I answered; and then told him the thought that alone had stopped me from shooting myself.

He listened in silence, and at the close nodded.

"You have enough wit when the wine's out—and you understand what you have done. Were you other than you are, you would be tried by court martial and shot. But your act is worse than that of a mutineer—you are a coward"—I started to my feet—"because you have struck a man you know cannot demand satisfaction."

I sank again into my chair and covered my face in shame, for the taunt was true. But to have it thus flung at me ruthlessly was worse than a red hot brand plunged into my flesh.

The old man stopped and looked at me, pleased that he had tortured me.

"There is but one course open to you. You know that?"

"I know it," I answered sullenly.

"Only one reparation you can make. Your death can appear to be either accidental or natural—anyhow, provided that it occurs at once. You can have a week—after that, if you are alive, you will die an infamous death."

"I understand," I replied, rising as he rose. "Will you give my assurance to the prince and the emperor that——"

"I am no tale bearer, sir," he answered sternly. "The one desire now is to forget that you ever lived;" and flinging these harsh words at me, he left me humiliated, ashamed, angry, and impotently remorseful.

Not another word should pass my lips.

How should I die? It was not so easy as it seemed. A fatal accident to appear genuine called for clever stage management, and I did not see how to arrange matters.

I applied for leave and went to Berlin. There was one man there who could help me—old Dr. Mein. He was a bachelor recluse, an Englishman, who had been naturalized, and in the old days he had been in love with my mother.

It was she who told me the tale just before her death, when urging me to trust him should I ever find myself in need of an absolutely reliable, level headed friend. I knew that he loved me for the English blood in my veins.

I told him what I had to do, but at first did not mention the cause.

He listened intently, questioned me shrewdly and then stopped to think.

"You want me to murder you, or, at least, give you the means of murdering yourself," he said bluntly.

"If you don't help me, I shall do it without you, that's all," I returned.

He paused again to think, pursing up his lips and fixing his keen blue eyes upon me.

"I have loved you like my own son, and you ask me to kill you."

"My mother would have had me come to you, because I am in trouble."

"You have no right to be in trouble. You are no fool. You have all your father's wealth—millions of marks; you have your mother's English blood—what is much better, you have her brains—which is best of all; you have a noble profession—the sea; you enjoy the imperial favor and friendship—a slippery honor, maybe; and you are certain of rapid promotion to almost any height you please. Why, then, should you want to die?"

"Because I have sacrificed everything by my reckless temper," I answered, and told him what had happened. "I have no option but to die," I concluded. "If you will not help me——" I broke the sentence and got up to go.

"I didn't say I wouldn't help you—I will." I sat down again. "You don't care how you die, so long as it's quickly?" I shook my head. "Very well. I have in my laboratory the bacilli of a deadly fever. I will inject the virus into your veins. In three days you will be in the fever's grip, and in less than a week you will be dead."

I took off my coat and bared my arm to show my readiness.

"I make only one condition. You must be ill here; I must watch the progress of the experiment."

"Nothing will suit me better," I returned.

He made the injection there and then, and gave me two days to be away and wind up my affairs; and when I returned to him, he made another injection and put me to bed.

That night I was in a raging fever. All the paraphernalia of a sick bed were soon in evidence, and the following day it was noised all over Berlin that the wealthy young Count von Rudloff was down in the grip of a fever at the house of a once well known physician, Dr. Mein.

The little house was besieged with callers. A few only were admitted. Von Augener was one, and he brought with him the court physician.

I grew worse rapidly; and only in intermittent gleams of intelligence was I conscious of the lean, grizzled face and watchful blue eyes of the doctor bending over me; assuring me that I was a most interesting case, and rapidly growing worse.

For three days this continued, until in a moment of consciousness I heard him say to the nurse: "He cannot last through the night;" and the woman turned and looked sympathetically toward the bed.

I tried to speak, but could not. I could scarcely move; but they noticed my restlessness, and the doctor came and bent over me.

"Am I dying?" I whispered.

"Yes. You must have courage. You are dying."

"I am glad. Thank you. I have no pain." He turned away and after a moment gave me my medicine. Then with a touch, soft like a woman's, he smoothed the bed clothes, and bending down put his lips to my forehead; and left me glad, as I had said, that the end had come thus calmly.

I must have become unconscious again almost directly after that, for I know nothing of what happened until I awoke gradually and found myself in a place that was pitch dark. I was lying on the floor, though it felt soft, like a mattress, and when I stretched out my arm I touched a wall that was soft like the floor.

I was quick in jumping to a conclusion. The doctor had fooled me and probably fooled everybody else about my illness and death. If I had ever been ill I was quite well now, and I scrambled up and strode about the place, feeling all the walls and floor and everything within my reach.

I soon knew where I was. It was the old fellow's padded room. I knew, too, that I could do no good by struggling or shouting or trying to get out of it. I must wait; and I sat down on the floor to think.

After what seemed like many hours, an electric light was switched on, and I saw a sheet of paper pinned to the wall. It was a letter from the doctor.

I have done what your mother would have wished. You have the makings of a real man in you, and you must not die. Every one thinks you dead; and not a soul suspects. Your funeral took place yesterday amid all the pomp of court mourning; and all the papers today are full of descriptions of your career, your illness, death, and funeral. But you will live to do yourself justice; if need be in another name. Your next career you must make, however, and not merely inherit. But you are your mother's son and will not flinch.

The old man had known me better than I knew myself. I had been glad to die; but the pulse of life runs strong in the twenties; and the shrewd old

beggar was right. Half an hour later I was glad to live; and when he came to me I was quite ready to thank him for what he had done.

We had a long talk about my future, and he urged me to go to England. "You can be an Englishman; indeed, you are one already. Your family must have rich and powerful friends there; and there you can make a career."

But I would not give my assent. I had no plans, and was in the mood to make none.

"I will see," I answered. "I am a dead man; and the dead are more the concern of Providence than the living. I will drift for a while in the back waters," and I shrugged my shoulders.

I made no plans. That night I left Berlin, and as the train whirled me southward I tried with resolute hand to make the barrier that shut out the old life so bullet proof that not even the stinging thoughts of impotent remorse and regret could wound me.

I was only human, however, and barely twenty three, and the sorrow of my loneliness was like a cankered wound. I felt like a shipwrecked derelict waif on the wide, callous sea of stranger humanity.

And like a derelict I drifted for a while, and accident determined a course for me. At Frankfort, where I stayed a considerable time a chance meeting in a hotel gave me as a companion an actor, and in his room at the theater one night he asked me if I would care to join his company. All life was to be but a burlesque for me, and as the training might be useful, I consented.

I threw myself into the mimic business with ardor, and stayed with the company four years. Under the guise of professional enthusiasm I became a past master in the art of making up, and altered my appearance completely. I changed my voice until it was two full tones lower than by nature, and I practised an expression and accent altogether unlike my own.

Under the tuition of a clever old acrobat, who had deformed himself until he was past work, I changed entirely the character of my walk and carriage. I cultivated assiduously marked peculiarities of gesture and manner; and by constant massage, even the contour of my features was altered, and lines and wrinkles were brought out with results that astonished me.

After some three years of this I tested these results by a visit to the only man who knew me to be alive—Dr. Mein. I wished him to know what I was doing, but was not willing to trust the secret to paper.

I went to him in my professional name, Heinrich Fischer, and consulted him for half an hour about an imaginary complaint, without his having an idea of my identity. Once or twice he looked at me with an expression of rather doubting inquiry; but he did not know me. He wrote me a prescription, and rising to go I laid a fee on his table.

Then I lingered on, and he glanced at me in polite surprise. I smiled; and he fixed his little glittering eyes on mine steadily, as if I were a lunatic.

"Have you any more bacilli to spare, doctor?" I whispered.

A start, a quick frown, and the closing together of his eyebrows showed his surprise. Then he wheeled me round to the light.

"Are you——?" He stopped short, his face alight with doubt and interrogation.

"I am Heinrich Fischer, an actor—now," I replied.

The last word was quite enough, and the tough old man almost broke down in the delight of recognition. When I explained to him the elaborate processes by which I had changed my figure, looks and voice, he grew intensely interested in me as a strange experiment, and declared that not a soul in all the world would recognize me.

My visit was brief, though he pressed me to stay with him; and when I would not, he said he would come to me, and that I must be his adopted son.

But he never came, and we never met again. A letter or two passed between us—I had altered even my handwriting—and then, a year later, came the news that he was dead, and that I was left his heir.

This again changed my life, for his fortune gave me abundant means, and as I considered my actor training had been sufficient, I resolved to close that chapter of my life.

It would have been a commonplace affair enough, with an accompaniment of nothing more than a few mutual personal regrets, but for one incident. One of the actresses, a handsome, passionate woman, named Clara Weylin, had done me the quite unsolicited honor to fall violently in love with me; and when at the time of parting I could not tell her that we should ever meet again—for I had not the least intention or wish to do so—she was first tearful, then hysterical, and at last vindictively menacing.

"There's a secret about you, Fischer," she cried passionately. "I've always thought so; and mark me, I'll find it out some day; and then you'll remember this, and your treatment of Clara Weylin. Look to yourself."

I tried to reason away her somewhat theatrical resentment, but she interpreted my words as an indication that she had struck home, and she flung away with a toss of the head, another threat, and a look of bitter anger.

I thought no more of the incident then—though afterwards I had occasion enough to recall it—and when the evening brought me a letter from her couched in very loving terms, I tossed it into the fire with a feeling akin to contempt. The next morning I left the town early, and was off on a purposeless and once more planless ramble.

With the stage I dropped also my stage name; for I had no wish to be known as an ex playactor; and as the old doctor's original counsel chanced to occur to me, I turned English.

I now let my beard and mustache grow, and I was satisfied that with my changed carriage and looks, not a soul in the whole Fatherland would recognize in Henry Fisher, a sober looking English gentleman, traveling for pleasure and literary purposes, the once well known Count von Rudloff.

I moved from point to point aimlessly for some months until the vapid, vacuous monotony of the existence sickened and appalled me.

Then suddenly chance or fate opened a gate of life.

CHAPTER II.—A GATE OF LIFE.

I WAS droning in the small Rhine town, Hamnel, close to Kehl, and struck up a casual acquaintance with a man of about my own age, named Von From-

berg, to whom I had been at first attracted somewhat by the fact that in some respects he resembled myself. It happened, too, that one night I was able to render him a little service.

I was walking late near the river, when he came rushing up to me to beg me to help him against the attack of a couple of men who were running after him with some angry threats. He was trembling and very much excited, although there did not seem to me to be much cause for fear; for the men sheered off as soon as they saw he was no longer alone.

My companion was greatly agitated, however, and talked, as I thought, very absurdly, about my having saved his life. For the next two or three days he would scarcely leave my side; and during that time he poured into my ears much of what was filling his soul. It was only a little soul; and the contents mere tags and patches of disheveled passion and emotions; though to his all real and disturbing enough.

He was a student and a dreamer, and, of course, in love. He had in some way got mixed up in some brawling with the men I had seen pursuing him, and the whole trouble had set his little pulses throbbing and palpitating with the fear of terrible but quite vague consequences.

He told me also his love troubles. The girl he wished to marry was French, and while his people hated the French, her father would only allow him to marry the daughter if he would become a Frenchman. And mingled up with all this was a strange story of family complications.

The pith of this was that his uncle, the head of the family, the Prince von Gramberg, a well enough known man, had written to urge him to go at once to the castle, declaring that his instant presence was imperative. Von Fromberg was thus the prey of three sets of emotions—desire to marry the French girl, terror of the men he had in some way provoked, and deadly fear that his uncle would prevent his turning French, and so stop his marriage.

The last disquieted him the most.

"He has never seen me," he cried quite passionately; "never even given a thought to me, till I suppose he thinks that as his son is now dead, I can be of some use to him. And he is such a fire eating old devil, he would think nothing of kidnapping me and shutting me up till I did what he wanted and gave up my marriage. He loathes everything French."

It was difficult to associate Von Fromberg with any very fire eating kith and kin, but I sympathized vaguely, and soon found out his reasons for giving me his confidence.

He wanted me to help him, and the request took a singular shape.

He was to be married in two days' time, and was crossing the frontier to Charmes for the purpose; and as he was very fearful of interruption and pursuit, he wished me to remain in Hamnel for a couple of days in his name.

It sounded ridiculous, and, of course, I demurred, pointing to a dozen difficulties that might follow. He pressed me very strongly, however, until I had to tell him pretty curtly that I would do nothing of the sort. He was silent a minute, and then said:

"Of course, it must be as you please, but if I tell people that your name is really Von Fromberg and mine Fisher, it will not hurt any one."

"I shall very speedily undeceive them," I answered promptly, and thought little more about the matter.

But on that day I had to change my residence, and the next morning I found to my annoyance that he had indeed told the people at both houses that my name was in reality Von Fromberg and his Fisher.

It was too small a matter to make a fuss about; and as I reflected that the only result would be to let him get married with fewer fears, I kept my anger till we should meet again.

But I little foresaw the consequences.

I was away for several hours in the latter part of the day, walking and sketching, and on my return to the house at night I thought there was something strange in the manner of a servant, who met me and said two gentlemen were waiting for me in my room.

"For me?" I said, with some astonishment; for I could not think of any two men in the whole empire likely to come for me.

"Yes, sir, for you. They asked for you first as Herr von Fromberg, and then as Mr. Fisher."

"Some more tomfoolery," I thought, as I went up the stairs; and then it flashed across me that they might be connected with the visit Von Fromberg had been fearing.

A glance at the two men, who rose at my entrance, showed me they were at least gentlemen; officers, I thought, in mufti. They were both dark and one, the elder, wore a beard, the other a heavy mustache only.

"Good evening, gentlemen," I said quietly. "To what do I owe the favor of this visit?" I was disposed to be on my guard for Von Fromberg's sake.

The man with the beard answered.

"This in the first time we have met, Herr von Fromberg. My name is Von Krugen, and my friend's, Steinitz." I was not quite sure whether to repudiate Von Fromberg's name at once, or to wait until I knew more of the errand. I decided that it could do no harm to wait.

"And your object in coming?" I asked. I saw a glance pass between the two, and the younger stepped past me and took up a position near the door.

This interested me at once. It was quite obviously a move to prevent my running away. They seemed to understand Von Fromberg's character.

"I think you will be able to guess," he replied, waiting until his companion had carried out the maneuver. "We wish to have a little private conversation with you and to induce you to go with us—you will know where."

"And to make sure that it shall be private I suppose you get your friend to stand over there by the door," I said, motioning toward him.

"A merely superfluous caution, I am sure," was the answer, given with a smile. "Though a locked door always keeps intruders out."

"And prisoners in," I retorted.

"True," he assented, with another smile. "So you may as well lock it, Steinitz," and this was done promptly.

I laughed. I had, of course, nothing to fear.

"I shouldn't run away," I said. "You interest me too much; though what on earth you are doing here, I can't for the life of me guess."

"We come from your uncle, the Prince von Gramberg, and I am specially charged to tell you that matters of the deepest moment, involving issues of life and death, make it absolutely imperative that you should go with us to the castle at once."

He spoke in so earnest a tone that his words produced an immediate effect upon me. I had no right to play fast and loose with the affairs of a powerful family—and the prince's reputation was well enough known to me. Obviously I must at once explain the mistake as to my identity. I was sorry I had not done so before.

"You are speaking in error, and I must tell you before you say another word. I am not the nephew of the Prince von Gramberg."

"I am aware you have denied yourself. You are Herr von Fromberg? I addressed you so a minute since."

"No. My name is not Von Fromberg, but Fisher. I am English."

"Oh, yes; I know that. They told me that you preferred to be called that. But I am not here to pay heed to small preferences of the kind. These are no trifling concerns."

"They are no concerns of mine at all," I answered shortly. "And now that I have explained this, have the goodness to leave my rooms." I turned to the door as I spoke, but the man standing there made no movement at all.

"Where, then, is Herr von Fromberg?" asked the older man, with incredulity manifest in his tone.

"I cannot tell you. I believe I know; but I am not at liberty to say."

"I did not think you would be," he returned drily. "But are you prepared to go to the castle with us? You can explain afterwards that we have taken you there wrongfully," he added with ironical courtesy.

"Certainly I am not." I spoke warmly, for his manner irritated me.

"Then will you have the goodness to inform me how it is that you are here in the character of Herr von Fromberg? With the people of the house looking upon you as that gentleman, and yourself answering to the name?"

My story was too tame and lame for me to think of telling it. I took shelter behind indignation.

"I shall certainly give no explanation which is demanded of me by those who have forced themselves into my room and hold me a prisoner in it in this way," I answered hotly.

"Then you will scarcely be surprised that, as I have been informed you are Herr von Fromberg, and you have answered to the name to me, I cannot accept your repudiation. I do not know why you are so anxious to deny your identity and to keep away from the great position that has opened to you since the death of the prince's son." This was thrown out to test me.

"I should refuse no position offered to me, I can assure you—if it were offered rightfully. But I am not the prince's nephew."

"You are sufficiently like him to satisfy me, and I'm a good deal mistaken if you have not a good deal of his highness' spirit. But now it is useless to talk any more here. You will go with us, of course?" he added abruptly.

"Of course, I will do nothing of the sort."

"Very well then, I suppose we must go alone. Steinitz!" he called

sharply, jerking his head as if bidding the other to unlock the door; and himself turning as if to leave the room.

My back was to the second man, and before I even suspected treachery he sprang upon me from behind, pinioned my arms and bound them, while the elder man held a revolver pointed right between my eyes.

"I am sorry you have driven me to do this," he said; "for I am, perhaps, making you a deadly enemy, when I would rather serve you with my life if necessary. But my master's orders are imperative. We are playing for high stakes there, and have to throw boldly at times. Your presence is necessary at the castle, and my instructions are to take you there, free or by force. Will you go without compelling me to use force?"

I looked calmly at his revolver. There was no fear he would fire.

"We can scarcely cross the empire in a procession of this kind," I said, meeting his stern look with a smile and a shrug of the shoulders.

"We shall not try," he answered promptly. "We shall go as doctors, you as a mad patient who has escaped from an asylum. I have come prepared with the necessary papers; and I need not remind you that your own actions here have helped this plan."

"I tell you again, I am not the man you seek," I cried angrily; for I saw the power of his threat.

"I take my chance of that. You can explain to the prince."

"This is monstrously ridiculous," I exclaimed hotly. "There are a thousand proofs here in this room that I am not the man you want. Put your hand in my pocket here, and you will see by my letters proof of what I tell you."

After a moment's pause he did so; and then, too late, I remembered Von Fromberg had given me one of his uncle's letters to read, which I had not returned. The man chanced to take it out first, and held it up.

"Your own proof," he said laconically; and thrust them all back again.

"You are making fools of every one concerned," I cried very angrily.

"Will you give your word of honor to go with us?" was his answer, stolidly spoken. "It is time to start."

It was useless to fight further, so with another shrug of the shoulders I gave up.

"I warn you the whole thing's a farce, though I can't make you believe it. I'll go with you; but you must put up with the consequences." In another moment I was free, and he was profuse with his apologies.

As we opened the door to leave, some one came running up the stairs, looking hot and agitated. To my relief, it was Von Fromberg.

"How is it you're back so soon?" I cried. "Never mind how it is; you come in the nick of time, anyhow. This is Herr von Fromberg, gentlemen. These gentlemen are from your uncle and wish you to go with them."

"You said you would go freely with us, sir," whispered the elder man at my side. "You gave your word of honor."

"But this is the man you want," I cried, pointing to Von Fromberg, who was staring like one panic stricken from me to the others.

The elder man turned to him.

"Are you Herr von Fromberg?"

"Certainly not," he stammered, with a quick look of appeal to me. "This is——" He quailed before the look I gave him and stopped.

"You are not going to deny yourself, man?" I cried.

"Deny myself, Von Fromberg," he answered with a forced, uneasy laugh. "Why should I? My name is Fisher. Do you want me?" he said to the two.

"Certainly not. Our business is with this gentleman. This is Herr von Fromberg, is it not?"

"Yes, certainly," was the reply with another forced laugh.

"Now, will you keep your word?" said the man in a meaning tone to me. "Or will you compel me——" He did not finish the sentence.

"Oh, just as you like. Only I warn you it's all an infernal blunder;" and with that I went with them.

At the bottom of the stairs I turned and looked up at the man for whom I was mistaken. He nodded and made signs to me as if thanking me and urging me to keep up the deception.

I said not a word more, but went with the two men in dogged silence. When we reached the station I flung myself into a corner of the railway carriage, my companions mounting guard over me, one at my side, the other in the opposite corner.

We traveled through the night, changing trains more than once; sometimes traveling at express speed, sometimes crawling, and now and again making long stops at junctions.

I scarcely spoke, except to protest that it was all a fool's journey; and when the elder man attempted to talk to me, I stopped him peremptorily, saying that as a stranger I had not the least wish to learn anything of the family's affairs. I would not hear a word until we reached the castle.

There, however, a surprise awaited me that pierced the shell of my apathy in an instant and filled me with a sudden longing to go on with the strange part for which my companions had thus cast me.

The greatest deference was shown to me on my arrival, and I was ushered into a large and lofty room, while the elder man went to inform the prince of my arrival, the younger man remaining with me.

The castle was certainly magnificent; and I could not refrain from an intense wish that I were indeed the heir to such a glorious place and position. My thoughts slipped back to the old life that I had thrown away, contrasting it with the mockery of my stale, humdrum existence, and I asked myself what I would not give for such a career as I felt I could build out of the materials fortune had now shoveled into my lap with this taunting munificence.

Then I saw from the window a young, golden haired girl standing among the flower beds. She was dressed all in black, the exquisitely beautiful and regular features set and saddened with an expression of profound grief and melancholy.

She was holding some freshly picked roses in her hand, and after she had plucked one or two others, a serving maid approached her and said something to her; and she turned and looked towards the window at which I stood.

Probably mere curiosity was the motive, but to me it seemed as if the look were instinct with anxiety, doubt, and appeal.

Suddenly I saw her start and glance round; and if ever a face told of fear and repulsion, hers did, for all the struggle that her pride made to repress the evidence of her emotion and to force up a smile to cover an aching heart.

Then I saw the cause of the change.

A man came into view, and my heart gave a great leap of anger that had long slumbered. I had known him in the old life for the falsest scoundrel that ever cheated a friend or ruined a woman. The mere sight of him set me on fire. He had dealt me a foul and treacherous wrong, and when I had sought him to call him to account, he had fled, and I could never trace him.

I watched him now as he spoke to the girl, and my old hate awoke till I could have found it in me to rush out there and then, to cast his foulness in his face, and choke his life out of him. And my brow gathered in an angry scowl as I watched the girl's struggle between pride and loathing when she answered him and shrank back from the sensual, brute stare of his eyes.

As soon as I could keep my voice steady I called my companion to the window.

"Who are those?" I asked.

"The Countess Minna, the prince's only daughter, now his only child. It is she who, under heaven, will be the queen of——" He checked himself when he caught my look of intense surprise.

"And the man. Who is he?"

"The Count von Nauheim, her future husband?"

"God help her, then," said I, with involuntary fervor. My companion started and looked at me.

"Do you know——"

"I know nothing," I replied very curtly. "These are no concerns of mine. But I can read a face." He looked at me searchingly; but I had taken my watch out and was playing with the guard. "This prince seems a devil of a long time sending for me. If he keeps me much longer I shall lose my train back." I spoke indifferently, throwing myself into a chair to think.

I sat a long time buried in these old rustled reflections until the chain of thought was snapped abruptly, and I sprang to my feet as a great cry ran through the castle and the sound of a woman's sobbing.

"What's that?" I asked of the man with me, who had changed color and was manifestly disturbed.

"I don't understand it," he said, after a long pause, during which he went and stood by the door as if doubting whether I might try to leave.

The sounds of confusion in the castle increased.

Servants were hurrying in all directions; but no one came to us.

Later on, the toll of a heavy bell resounded with vibrating echoes through the hot, sleepy air.

A minute after it was repeated, and before the sound had died away the elder of the two men came back into the room.

He was deadly pale and so agitated that his voice trembled.

He approached me and bowed with signs of deep respect.

"I bring you the worst of news. The prince is dead; and your highness is master in his stead."

"Dead!" I cried in the profoundest astonishment.

"He was stricken this morning, and lay dying when we entered the castle. And he was dead before your highness could be summoned."

A protest leaped to my lips. But I did not give it utterance.

The thought of the girl I had seen, the Countess Minna, left helpless in the power of that consummate villain, Von Nauheim, silenced me. I would wait until at least I had had time to think out a course of action.

CHAPTER III.—"AS YOUR HIGHNESS WILL."

THE perplexing difficulty of my position was extreme. The eyes of both men were fixed on me, waiting upon my slightest word, and eager to show their allegiance to me as the new head of the house.

A career of magnificent promise lay invitingly at my very feet, and I had but to utter a word to step into a position of power and influence.

Moreover, every chivalrous instinct of my nature was stirred with a desire to save the beautiful girl I had seen from the clutches of the man threatening her with worse than ruin; while my red hot desire for revenge on the man himself was prompting me to stay where I was until at least I could expose and punish him.

His sin against me had been the one absolutely unforgivable. He had married my sister; and too late we had discovered that at the time he was already married. The blow and the shame had killed her and broken my mother's heart; and over my sister's coffin I had sworn to have his life for hers. But he had fled, and no efforts of mine had been able to find him up to the hour of my own supposed death.

And now here he was, delivered into my hands and actually in the very act of repeating his foul offense. Fate had surely brought us together in this dramatic fashion. I could not disclose my identity to him; but I could be the agent to detect this new sin and could thus myself punish him for the old.

With my pulses throbbing with this fire, was it likely that I could make an instant decision in accordance with the dictates of mere surface conventionality? I held back from the decision, and even then might have persisted in avowing the truth, when the man himself came ruffling into the room.

His strong, dark, coarse features wore an expression of bullying assertiveness; his manner was that of the lord of the place toward an interloper; and he spoke to me in the hectoring tone of a master toward an inferior servant.

The personal contact with him, the sound of his voice, the insolent look of his heavy eyes, and my old hate of him, were like so many knots on a whip-lash goading me to fury.

"I heard you had come, but I suppose you know your errand is a fruitless one." Had I been the most contemptible lickspittle on the meanest and greediest quest his expression could not have been worse. I saw the other two men exchange a rapid glance.

"What do you deem my errand?" I asked quietly.

"Oh, that's plain enough," he answered with a sneer. "You've come after what you can get. The prince probably sent you by these agents of his"—with a contemptuous sweep of the hand toward them—"some wonderful account of the good things in store for you here, and very naturally you came to gather them. But the prince's death has knocked the bottom out of that barrel;" and he laughed very coarsely. "There's nothing here for you except an empty title and a beggarly old castle, mortgaged from the bottom of the old moat to the tip top of the flagstaff. That and a mess of very hazardous intrigue is all you can hope for here."

This speech, coarse and contemptible as it was under such circumstances, was not to be compared with the ineffable brutality of the manner which marked its delivery. I was astounded that any man could so behave; but I saw his motive instinctively.

He had heard little of me except as a meek spirited student, likely to shy at any personal danger, and his object was to frighten me away.

"And who are you, then?" I asked. "These gentlemen have told me nothing of the position of matters here."

"Then the sooner you know something the better. Have the goodness to leave us, Captain von Krugen."

The latter started, as I thought angrily, at the sharp, imperious tone in which he was addressed, and glanced at me in some hesitation.

"Do you hear me, sir?" exclaimed Von Nauheim, still more sharply; and then, getting no sign from me, the two men left the room. "That fellow gets more presuming every day. The prince made far too much of him; but I'll soon have a change. So, you don't know the position of things here, eh, Mr. Student? Do you set much store on your life?" And he eyed me very sharply, expecting to see me wince.

I did not disappoint him. I started, and in a tone of some alarm asked:

"Why? There is no danger of that sort here, is there?"

"Do you know how your late cousin, Gustav, lost him?"

"What do you mean?"

"Ah, I thought the question would surprise you. I'm not going to tell you everything, because these matters are for men of action and not book-worms. He died in a duel, forced on him for the sole reason that he was the prince's next heir."

"Oh, but that cannot be possible," I cried, as if incredulous.

"Possible?" he echoed with a laugh. "Can you fight? Can you stand before the finest swordsmen, or the picked shots in all Bavaria?"

"I don't see the necessity."

"Perhaps not—just yet," he returned drily. "Poor Gustav didn't—but the time came none the less. The man who puts on the mantle of the dead prince up stairs must look to find little in the pockets except challenges."

"But what of you? Who are you? Why do you tell me this?"

"Because I dislike attending funerals," he replied with a grim laugh. "Besides, I am a soldier, and it's my business to fight. You have probably heard my name already. I'm the Count von Nauheim, and the late prince's daughter is my betrothed wife."

"And you mean, I suppose, that all the prince's wealth will pass to the daughter."

"That is the prince's will. And you weren't in time to get him to alter it, you see," he sneered; but I let the sneer pass for the moment.

"Then you will be the head of the family in all but the name, the husband of the daughter, the owner of the wealth, and the guardian of its honor?"

"You can put a point with the clearness of a lawyer," he said.

"Have you then fought the man who killed the son, Gustav?" As I asked the question I kept my eyes fixed steadily on his; and all his bluster could not hide his discomfiture.

"These are things you don't understand," he said brusquely. "There is much behind—too much to explain to you."

"But if you say that my cousin Gustav was murdered; that you know this to be so; that fighting is your business; and that you are the guardian of the family's honor, why have you not called the murderer to account?"

"I tell you you don't understand these things. We don't manage matters like a parcel of swaggering student duels."

"Apparently not," I answered, in a studiously quiet tone. "Students would say in such a case that you did not fight because—you dared not."

"You speak with a strange license, and if you are not careful you will get yourself into trouble," he cried furiously, trying to frighten me with a bullying stare. "You won't find every one ready to make such allowances for your gaucherie as I am. You will have the goodness to withdraw that suggestion."

"I will do so with pleasure the moment I know you have challenged the man you call a murderer; or have repeated in his presence what you have said about him to me."

His surprise at this unexpected tone of quiet insistence on my part was almost laughable; but he tried to carry it off and bear me down with his boisterous, bullying manner.

"You had better take heed how you presume on my forbearance toward one in your position, or even the fact that you are nominally a member of the family will not prevent me from giving you a pretty severe lesson."

"You mean, I suppose, that although you dared not challenge the man who killed Gustav, you think you might tackle me with impunity. That is not a very high standard of courage;" and I shrugged my shoulders and curled my lips in contempt as I added: "If that is all the protection the Gramberg honor can rely upon, God save the family's reputation."

The sneer drove him mad, and the blood rushed to his face until every one of his coarse features glowed with his passion.

"With the prince lying dead in the castle this is not the time for such a matter to be settled; but I will not suffer such an insult, even from you, to pass unpunished. Why should you seek to force a quarrel on me at such a time?"

"You forget, the quarrel is of your making," I answered coolly. "The moment you entered this room you insulted me by saying I had come here for what I could get, and sneered that I was too late to induce the prince to

alter the will leaving his property to his daughter. In my view that will is perfectly just and right. Then for some object, I know not what as yet, you tried to frighten me into running away from the place altogether. You have mistaken your man, sir. I have no hankering for the late prince's wealth; but what you have said of yourself is more than enough to prove that the honor of my family is not in safe keeping when left in your hands. As there is nothing but that honor, I will accept that part of the inheritance."

Rage, hate, threats, and baffled malice were in the look he turned on me at this.

"You wish to make me your enemy?"

"At least I have no wish to make you my friend," I retorted.

"You will live to repent this bitterly," he cried with an oath. "We will have no meddlers here in the path of our purpose;" and still more enraged by the smile which the threat evoked from me, he went hurriedly out of the room.

Truly my period of self repression had wrought a great change in me. Five years before his hot insolence would have so fired me that I would have made him answer for it on the spot; but now I could hold my anger in check and wait for my revenge.

But this little conflict was my first live experience for five years, and the sense of it pleased me.

When the man had left me I had no longer any scruples about going forward with my new character. There was no one to be robbed of a fortune, no one to be supplanted in a coveted position; nothing but an overpawed castle to be gained.

There was, apparently, a dangerous intrigue to be faced, a sweet girl's honor to be saved, and a treacherous villain to be exposed and punished—not the kind of inheritance which many men would covet. But then, few men were ever placed in my situation.

I was thinking hard over all this when my two captors came back into the room, hurriedly, both very angry. Von Nauheim had seen them after leaving me and had vented his anger on them. They asked me now excitedly if it was my wish that they should leave the castle immediately after the prince's funeral.

I listened to them very quietly. I had already had pretty strong evidence of the lengths to which their zeal for the family's affairs would induce them to go; and Von Nauheim's hostility to them was a powerful recommendation in my eyes.

"I beg you to be calm, gentlemen," I said; "and to bear in mind that I know very little of the position of affairs here. I have understood from you that you were both largely in the late prince's confidence—indeed, you have given me pretty good proof of that since yesterday. But beyond that I do not know what your relations here have been in the past."

"We have been for years in the prince's confidential service. I myself enjoyed his closest confidence," answered Captain von Krugen. "But my allegiance is to the head of the house. I recognize no one else."

"And you desire to remain in that service?"

"I have no other wish in life, sir," he replied earnestly.

"Nor I," assented the other.

"If you were in his confidence, you will know that the late prince has left to his successor no means of maintaining a large retinue."

"What I am, and all that I have I owe to your late uncle," said the captain, in the same earnest tone. "I ask nothing else than to place my sword and my fortune alike at your disposal. And I can speak for Steinitz here. Our liberty and lives are indeed at issue in the present crisis; and if all is not to fail ignominiously, we must have a strong hand and a clear head in command."

There was no mistaking the man's sincerity, and usurper though I was, the offer touched me.

"I believe you absolutely, Captain von Krugen, and you, Herr Steinitz;" and I gave them my hand. "But, all the same, I do not know what crisis you mean. Tell me freely."

"I tried to tell you on the journey here, but you prevented me. Do you know the history of your family—the lineage on the side of the late prince's wife?"

"I know very little. Speak as freely as if I knew nothing. You will not try my patience."

"Steinitz, see that there is no one about; and keep guard outside the door, that no one enters." He paused while the younger man withdrew; and then, leading me to a deep window seat at the end of the room, began to speak in a low tone.

"There is a traitor somewhere among us, and thus the greatest need for caution. For a long time previous to his death your uncle was engaged in a task that involved the highest issues of state. The extreme discontent at the antics of the madman who is now king of Altenwald induced a number of the more prominent and bolder men in the country to plot his overthrow. There is a slip in his ancestry, and the disappearance of a certain Prince Oscar, who was the heir to the throne, let in the younger branch of the family, through whom the title has descended to the present king.

"Oscar was supposed to have died, but he was only eccentric. He lived in secret retirement, married and left a son. From that son, who was unquestionably the rightful heir, the late wife of your uncle came in direct descent. She was the only child of the eldest line, and by right she should have reigned as queen. As you know, she died and left the two children, Gustav, who was killed in a duel, and the daughter, who is in the castle at this moment."

"Do you mean——?" I began when he paused.

"I mean that the Countess Minna von Gramberg should at this moment be the queen of Altenwald; and that by God's held we shall all live to see her crowned." His dark face flushed, and his eyes glowed with the enthusiasm of this speech.

My own feeling was more wonderment than enthusiasm, however. If this most hazardous and ambitious scheme were afoot, what could be the meaning of Von Nauheim's share in it as the betrothed husband of a future queen?

"The prince's first intention was, of course, to put his son on the throne, and matters were indeed well ripe for this, when, unfortunately, he became imbroiled in a duel and was killed. That duel we believe to have been forced on him—murder in all but the actual form."

"And the man who killed him?" I asked.

"A noted Italian swordsman, Praga, hired and paid, as we believe, for his work."

"Hired? By whom?"

"By the family who stand next in succession to the throne. The king, as you know, has no children; and the succession passes to the Ostenburg branch of the family. That was my master's main hope. Our claims are stronger than theirs; and we had on this account secured the support of most of the prominent men in the country."

"Well?" I asked, for he paused with a gesture of disappointment.

"Count Gustav's death threw everything back. Where they had been ready to stand by a man, some of them drew back, frightened, from supporting a young girl—and unless a bold stroke be made now, everything may be lost."

"What bold stroke do you mean?"

"Like that planned before. Everything was ready. We thought the Ostenburg agents had not a suspicion of our plans. We had resolved to take advantage of the mad king's fancies to lure him out on one of those wild midnight drives of his, and then to seize his person and put one of ourselves in his place, made up, of course, to resemble him; and to let the dummy play the part of king long enough to enable us to get the madman where he ought to have been long since—into restraint. Then the dummy was to throw aside his disguise and declare that he had been acting by the king's orders; that the latter had abdicated and had proclaimed the Count Gustav his successor, as being the rightful lineal heir. We should have done the rest. It was a brave scheme."

"It was as mad as the king himself," said I. "But what then?"

"It was just before things were ripe that the other side got wind—through some treachery somewhere; and the count was killed in the duel."

"Well?"

"Half the cowards drew away. But they will all come back the moment they see us strike a blow; and it was to have you close at hand, helping in the good work, that the prince sent for you."

"And the Count von Nauheim?"

"The prince had supreme confidence in him. He was not with us at first; but his coming secured us the help of a very large and influential section of the people—enough to turn the balance indeed, and make the scheme certain of success. The prince welcomed him heartily enough and cheerfully complied with the conditions fixed by those for whom he acted—that the Countess Minna should be given to him in marriage."

This made me thoughtful, knowing as I did the man's character.

"And the daughter herself?"

My companion frowned, drawing his dark brows close together, and pursed up his lips, as he replied ambiguously:

"Neither man nor woman at such a time can think of any but reasons of state."

"You mean that she consented to give her hand, but could not give her heart with it."

"I mean more than that, sir, and I must speak frankly to you. The Countess Minna has never favored the scheme, but has strongly opposed it—and opposes it still. Women have no ambition. She has no longing for a throne, and now that her father is dead, I fear—well, I do not know what she may do. If you will urge her, she is her father's daughter, and will, I believe, go through with it. But much will depend upon you."

"And if she does not go on with it, what then?"

"We are all pledged too deeply to draw back now, your highness," he answered very earnestly. "We must either succeed or fail—there is no middle course—and failure means a prison or a convent for the prince's daughter; and worse than ruin for the rest of us. As for yourself, you, I warn you, will be the certain object of attack, for there is no safe obscurity here. The enemies of your highness' house will never rest satisfied while a possible heiress to the throne remains at large, or while those who have helped to put her there are alive and at liberty. As I told you at Hamnel, we are playing for desperate stakes, and must play boldly and like men."

Before I had time to reply we heard Steinitz in conversation with some one outside the door, and a moment later he opened it and said that the Countess Minna was anxious to see me, and was coming to the library for that purpose.

CHAPTER IV.—"YOU ARE HEAD OF THE HOUSE NOW."

MY chief feeling as I rose to receive the prince's daughter was a sort of shamefaced regret that I had allowed myself to be hurried into a position which made it necessary for me to mislead her. I meant her nothing but good. I had been brought to the castle all against my will. I had stayed there largely in order that I might be the means of saving her from danger; and everything I heard only served to increase that danger in my view.

Yet the fact of the deception I was practising hampered and embarrassed me in her presence.

She was garbed now in the deepest black; was pale and hollow eyed, and trembling under the stress of her new sudden sorrow; and she seemed so frail and fragile that my heart ached for her, while my senses were thrilled by her exquisite beauty and by a strange, subtle influence which her presence exercised upon me. My pulses beat fast with a tumultuous desire to help her in her helplessness.

Never, indeed, had woman moved me like this.

She paused a moment on the threshold, her hand on the arm of an elderly lady who accompanied her; and her large blue eyes rested on my face, searching, reading, and appealing, as I hastened across the room toward her. Her scrutiny appeared to give her confidence, for she withdrew her hand from her companion's arm and held it out to greet me.

"I felt I must come to bid you welcome, cousin," she said, in a low, sweet voice that trembled. "You are welcome—very welcome."

I took the hand and raised it to my lips.

"You should not have distressed yourself to come; I should have understood," I answered.

"I felt that I must see you," she said, very graciously; and I, remembering what I had seen in the garden and all that Von Krugen had told me, knew well enough the doubts and fears, anxieties and hopes, that might lie behind the words.

I racked my brain for some sentence that would convey some assurance of my wish to serve her; but I could find no words that pleased me, and after a pause that to me was awkward enough, she added: "You are now my only relative in the world, except my dear aunt here, the Baroness Gratz."

The old lady made a very stately and ceremonious bow, which I returned with such courtesy as I could command.

"A great heritage has come to you, sir, and a trust that must test to the utmost one so young in years," she said.

"My one life purpose shall be to prove worthy of it," I answered earnestly; and I thought the girl's eyes lightened a little at the words.

"We were alarmed, sir, when we heard that you were unwilling to come," said the baroness.

"I am here, madam, to remove that alarm."

"The future fortunes of this noble house rest largely in your hands—as well as those of this sweet child. You know that?" she asked in reply.

"I know little as yet, but in all I shall strive earnestly to win the confidence of you both."

"You will have mine, cousin," said the girl impulsively and almost eagerly, as it seemed to me. "And at the earliest moment I wish to tell you all that is in my thoughts and to ask your help."

"You will never ask that in vain, believe me," I returned, raising my eyes to hers, which had all the time been fixed on my face.

"I do believe you; I am sure of you," she cried again impulsively; and I could have blessed her for the words. "And oh, I am so glad you have come. There is so much to change and set right."

"Minna!" said the aunt in a gently warning tone.

"I am with friends, and I can speak freely. I feel it. I am sure we shall be friends, cousin. Shall we not? And you will be on my side?"

At this Captain von Krugen, who had remained at the other end of the room, took two or three steps forward, as if to speak; but the baroness interposed, and after a warning glance at him, whispered to the girl:

"We have not come for this now, child."

"The captain will be my friend, too, whatever happens, I am confident," said the girl looking toward him; "even if I will not go forward with a scheme that must die——" The word distressed her, and she caught her breath and her lips faltered so that she could not finish the sentence. She sighed deeply and turned to lean on her companion's arm again.

"You must not distress yourself, Minna," said the baroness gently.

A rather long, trying pause followed, during which Countess Minna appeared to be struggling to regain her self composure. And at the close she said sadly and listlessly, and yet with a great effort to speak firmly :

"I did not come to talk of these things now, but to ask you, consin, to do all that has to be done at this time of—of sorrow. You are the head of the house now, and I trust you will use the authority."

"Until you desire otherwise," I answered. "You may depend upon me absolutely."

"That is my wish, cousin; and when I can trust myself, we will have a long conference."

She gave me her hand, and I was in the act of putting it once more to my lips, when hurried steps approached, and the Count von Nauheim entered the room hastily.

I felt the girl's fingers start and involuntarily they closed on mine in a little trembling gesture of half agitation and fear. The touch thrilled me.

"I am surprised to find you here, Minna," he said bruskiy. "I think, baroness, it would have been more seemly if Minna had kept in her apartments."

The old lady was more afraid of him than Minna herself, I could see, and she murmured some half incoherent excuses.

"I see no wrong in coming here to welcome the head of the house," said the girl, trying to appear firm.

"Head of the house," he cried with a sneer. "You are the head of the house, and as your affianced husband it is for me to say what is necessary in these matters of courtesy. I have already seen Herr von Fromberg, to welcome him as you say. Nothing more was necessary. Let me give you my arm to take you to my apartments. Come."

She hesitated an instant and seemed as if about to refuse; but then changed and placed the tips of her fingers on his arm; and as she did so turned and bowed to me, with a smile on her sweet, sad, pale face.

"I shall see you, Cousin Hans, soon, as I said just now. In the mean time I rely upon you to order all such arrangements as you think best—as your position here now requires."

"This gentleman need not trouble himself," said the count, frowning heavily and angrily. "I have given all necessary instructions."

"I will do what you wish," I said to her, ignoring him entirely.

I kept out of sight my rage at his conduct until the three had left the room, and then, forgetting that I was not alone, I vented it in a heavy, bitter oath and turned to find Von Krugen's keen dark eyes fixed upon me.

I was annoyed to have thus bared my feelings to his quick gaze. I did not wish him to know that I suspected or even disliked the count; but he had seen it already.

"He would try to overrule even the prince himself in the latter time; and he takes interference very ill. He will ride roughshod over all of us, if he can."

"Ah, you do not like him," I answered. "But there is no room for dissensions among ourselves. Let it go no farther."

"Have you any commands to give, your highness? If I take them from him, I am to leave the castle." This was intended to see if I should exercise my authority.

"You will not leave, Captain von Krugen," I replied promptly. "Heaven knows there is too much need of a faithful friend as such a juncture."

He bowed, and his eyes lighted with pleasure at my words.

"And now," I added, "we will discuss together what has to be done and try to settle the arrangements."

There were, of course, many of these to be made, and the consultation occupied a long time. As a result, I issued a number of directions such as seemed best, including those for the funeral, which I fixed for three days later.

Then I had to consider my own matters and to mature a plan which I had formed after my interview with the Countess Minna. I felt that I could not continue the deception in regard to myself; and I resolved that I would use the interval before the funeral to try and find the real Von Fromberg and bring him to the castle to take his own position. I would come with him, and by using the knowledge I possessed, help him in a task which, if he had a spark of honor in his nature, he could not but undertake.

The next day I took the captain so far into my confidence as to tell him there was an urgent private matter to which I was compelled to attend, and that I must return to Hamnel for that purpose. I told him to keep the fact of my absence as secret as possible, saying merely that I was out riding or walking, and that I would return soon.

If the countess asked for me, he was in confidence to tell her the truth, and to assure her that in any event I should be back before the day of the funeral. Moreover, he was to keep a most vigilant watch over everything and everybody, and if my presence was urgently needed, to telegraph to me to Hamnel. But to no one was he to give that address.

I started early, and the same evening arrived at Hamnel; but failed to find Von Fromberg, either in his own name or in mine; and then I hurried on to Charmes. There I caught him, at the house of the Comte de Charmes, whose daughter, Angele, he was to marry.

At first he was like an emotional girl. He rushed into the room and would have embraced me had I not prevented him, while he loaded me with thanks and praise for having helped him to get free from his uncle by not declaring myself; while with all this he was profuse and gushingly voluble with his apologies.

He acted like a hysterical fool, bubbling over with silly laughter one moment and shedding equally silly tears the next. He was ridiculously light spirited and happy until his fantastic hilarity angered me. He appeared to think that as he had become a Frenchman, he ought to behave as a sort of feather headed clown.

His one consuming wish was that I should see Angele—the girl was the one object of his mental outlook at that moment and everything else was all out of perspective.

It was a long time before I could make him understand that a much more serious matter than his love farce had brought me to Charmes; and even

while I compelled him to listen to the position of affairs at the castle and the plight of his cousin there, I could see that his thoughts were away out of the room with his Angele.

"I am sorry for her, poor soul; I am sure I would have every one happy at a time like this. But I suppose it will be all settled somehow and some day," he said, at the close, in a tone which made me fully realize that he considered it no business of his.

"There is a train that starts from Charmes in an hour and a half," said I, thinking it best to assume that he would go back with me. "We can catch by that a fairly good connection at Strasburg, and can reach the castle to-morrow."

"You are going back then?" he queried.

"I think I can be of help to you."

"How can you help me if you are going there?"

"You will wish, of course, to hasten to the castle to save the honor of your family and of your cousin."

"My family is here. My home is France. I am no longer a German. I have made the declaration to become naturalized. Do you think I would leave Angele on almost the eve of my wedding day. Tomorrow we shall be man and wife. Shall I instead then go to look after the affairs of a dead old man, who never worried himself the paring of a nail about me until he thought I could be useful to him. What do you suppose Angele's father would say? Pouf! I can hear him. 'Very well, monsieur, go away. Attend to these people, these Germans; leave my daughter. Show yourself more German than French and give the lie to your protestations. Pretend to become a Frenchman one moment, and the next recognize the claims of your fatherland and your German blood and kinship. Go, by all means; but do not return. Never set eyes on Angele again!' Eh, do you think I shall do that?" And he threw up his hands, shoulders, and eyebrows in a perfect ecstasy of repudiation of the mere idea.

"A helpless young girl, your only kin in the world, is waiting there, dependent upon your assistance. You are now the head of that great family, whose honor and future are threatened; and the entire fortunes of your noble house are at a crisis which makes it imperative in all honor that you should assume the responsibilities of the position."

"And is there not a helpless girl here who will be dependent upon me? Am I not here taking the headship of a noble family? With this difference—that here I was not forgotten and ignored until I became necessary as a prop for a tottering wall. Would honor, think you, have nothing to say against my desertion of this family in the way you suggest? No, no, my friend; these people have appealed to your sentimental side. My place is here, and here I stop."

From that resolve no pleas, reproaches, arguments, or goads, could move him. Nothing should make him budge from Angele; and he viewed everything from that one new standpoint.

"If you are eager to free my family from the mess their affairs have been got into, take my place; go back and do it. You may claim by right all there

is to be got; for certainly I could not help if I would. If he who was all his life at this work could not keep his house from falling, his son from being killed, and his daughter from danger, what can I hope to do? I, a student, who have lived three quarters of my life in France, who loathe a military career, and who know absolutely nothing of the intricacies of diplomatic intrigue? You say you could help me? I don't know how; but if you could what is the gain for me? My uncle is dead, and leaves me nothing but a mess of intrigue and danger. My cousin is engaged and therefore will marry—and what is her husband to me?"

"Surely you are not dead to the demands of honor?" I cried; but against the wall of his selfishness the sea would have broken itself in vain.

"How do I serve my honor by forsaking Angele? No, no. I tell you I have ceased to be a German; I have renounced my family, and shall live under a new name. I am a student. This is work for men like you. Go and do it. I am rendering that girl a far greater service by sending you than by going myself."

It was useless to argue with him. He was hopelessly callous; and I sat biting my lips in anxious thought.

"When they know I have become a Frenchman, do you think they will accept help at my hands? Will they welcome my French wife? Or my new family? Should I wreck my own happiness to enable them to insult me and all that are now dear to me? Am I a fool? I will do what I can, but not that. If my cousin should need a home she shall have as comfortable a one as my means will provide. But they must not claim me as one of their own kin. That is all."

"They are not likely to make any claim of the kind on you," I said, and the bitter contempt I felt for him came out in my tone. He winced and flushed, and for a moment was stung to anger; but it passed.

"You think poorly of me because I have decided matters thus. As you will. We shall not meet again. Probably I shall never again cross the frontier. To show you my decision is no mere whim, but a deliberately chosen course, here I have a duly drawn up declaration renouncing my heirship. I drew it, of course, before I knew of the prince's death; and I declined absolutely his proposals and announced my intention to change my name and become a Frenchman. I was going to have this attested before a notary, and then send it to my uncle; but you can take it as it is, if you like. I will make a sworn declaration at any time it is desired. Do just what you will, and this I swear to you. I will never breathe a word of what has passed unless you wish me to speak. I owe you that for having brought you into the mess."

I took the paper and rose to leave.

"I will take means to let you know what is done. Here, I suppose?" I spoke curtly, for I felt strongly.

"I do not wish to hear anything. A letter here will find me, of course, but my name for the future will be Henri Frombe—Hans von Fromberg will have ceased to exist unless you are he." So indifferent was he to the critical seriousness of the affairs that he laughed as he said this and added: "You will not see Angele. I am grieved at that;" and he held out his hand.

"I cannot take your hand, M. Frombe," I said sternly. "I remain a German. Your desertion of your family at such a juncture of need makes any friendly feeling toward you impossible on my part. You hold that any man can lightly renounce his family and country. I do not. I take the strongest view of your conduct. France profits little by her newest citizen; and the Fatherland gains by the loss of so self satisfied a renegade. I trust that we shall not meet again."

He was a coward and shrank and paled under the lash of my words; but he made no attempt to resent them, and I left him with a feeling of bitter contempt and disgust at his conduct.

During the whole of my long journey back to the castle I sat absorbed in close thought, mapping out my plans, recalling old memories, and rousing my wits and energies for the task which fate had set me, and from which apparently I could not break away.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

AN ADIRONDACK RIVALRY.

BY CHARLES CHAPIN SARGENT, JR.

A story of the North Woods in which a breaker of the game laws and a constable strive for the love of old Bob White's daughter—The heritage of a city bred mother and how it nearly betrayed a girl's sweetheart.

"**H**EARD the latest news down to Bishop's?"

"Hi" Chester jumped as if a rifle had gone off in his face. He hastily kicked a few more boughs over the buck he had half buried on Fred's upper island, looking up to see who the speaker was, as he completed the hiding of his game. He smiled nervously as he replied:

"Oh, it's you, is it, Rannie? No, I've been up the inlet for a couple of days. What's happened now?"

Randolph Bancroft's grave face did not show that he knew Chester had just taken a deer out of season, nor did he anticipate "Hi's" astonishment which would result from the words:

"Tom Jameson's just come in from the Falls, and he's been made this year's game constable."

Hi Chester may have enjoyed the reputation of being the most inveterate breaker of game laws on Cranberry Lake, but no one ever heard him swear, so he only blew a long whistle and glanced furtively down to where the channel made through the deadwood above Kimball's Island.

"Is he coming up the lake today, Rannie?"

"I don't think so. Father was down home this morning, and Tom came over to our house to find out if Fred Howlett was in camp. When father said he was, Tom told him he'd come up on the steamer to Tramp's Retreat tonight, as he wanted to see Fred."

Hi took a long breath.

"Randolph," said he, "that news has taken the tuck clean out of me. Say, help me bury this buck better, will yer? I shot him on the way back

from Sternberg's, and thought I'd best not bring him down today. I knew it was about time for a constable to come in, but, gee whizz! I didn't think it would be Tom Jameson. You know how we hate each other, Rannie, and I've got to watch out now."

The two guides had completely covered up all tracks of their landing, and of the burying of the deer on the island. Then they made their way back to their boats.

"When he came into Bishop's and told the fellers that he had been made constable, Ab Thompson up and said: 'Hum, I know why you wanted to be appointed. You want to land Hi Chester in jail, so you can have a clear field with old Bob White's daughter, Carrie.' Then Ab gave me the wink, and knowing that you might stumble over a deer on the Sternberg trail, I thought I'd row up and tell you the news."

The older man had pushed off his boat, but he shoved it close up to Bancroft's and put out his hand.

"Thanks, Rannie, you done me a good turn. I won't forget it." Then he pushed off again and rowed up the lake.

"So that's what Tom's gone and done, is it?" Hi said to himself, as he plied his oars. "He went and got made constable, just to get me out of the way. Well, I'll fool the slick coon. I won't give up hunting, not by a darn sight. But if he comes a monkeying with me I'll take him for a deer some day when the season's on, and the courts 'll think it was an accident."

Now, in reality, Hi Chester was not of a murderous disposition, and he didn't mean all he told himself as he pulled up towards Umstead Landing. The thought was only prompted by the happenings of the past few months, culminating, as they did, with Tom Jameson's appointment to a game constablenesship.

For two whole years Hiram Chester had been making the trip up the lake to a little log camp that stood back a little way from the beginning of the trail to Umstead Mountain, near the Landing. Old man White lived there with his daughter, Carrie. Hiram's visits to the little house had been out of sympathy at first; for since Mrs. White had died old Bob had grown kind of queer and kept his daughter with him constantly, winter and summer.

Hi Chester had felt sorry for this poor girl, shut off from the life of the few settlers about Bishop's. She was never allowed to go down there to any of the parties or entertainments; so open hearted, good natured Hiram began to stop in at the Whites' on his hunting and fishing trips up Dead Creek and the inlet. Soon these occasional visits became frequent and regular, and then the gossips of Harewood began to tell of "Hi Chester's courtin' of old Bob White's darter, Carrie."

Finally Hiram had proposed to Carrie White. She loved this man for all the qualities which go to make up a likely helpmate through life in the North Woods. Carrie realized that Hi was honest and temperate, one of the best guides in the region, and a good shot, and that he was steady working, logging in the winter, and a well paid guide during the summer; but—ah, there is always a but to a maiden's affections—Carrie White's mother had not been born in that sphere where she had spent twenty five years of her life.

The old women of Harewood could tell of the romance of Bob White and his city bred bride.

It seems that years ago, long before Newton Falls became a settlement, a Mr Carpenter of Rochester had discovered what a sportsman's paradise was Cranberry Lake, and had spent several summers there in camp with his family. Carrie Carpenter was a girl with just the amount of love of an outdoor life to become charmed with a camper's existence. Bob White was one of Mr. Carpenter's guides, a handsome chap, tall, straight as the pine of his native forests, and possessed of a wistful expression in his face which immediately interested the romantic Miss Carpenter.

The result may be imagined. This woman who had been reared in civilization, gave up everything to marry the guide, Robert White, and live in the woods all the rest of her life.

So that is why there was a "but" in the affection of her daughter, Carrie White, for Hiram Chester. The child of this city bred woman, who had elected to forget her old existence and live the wild life of the forest, was situated in an exactly opposite position to that her mother had occupied. Carrie White had been born to the life her mother loved, and she longed for the life her mother had forsaken. Carrie had ambition. She wanted to break away from the narrow confines of being only a guide's daughter. She wanted to go into the civilization that her mother had hated.

That is why she hesitated when Hiram Chester had asked her to be his wife. She felt proud to have the love of the best man in the whole region, and she told Hi so. Hi couldn't see, then, why Carrie wouldn't marry him. She urged him to leave the woods, go out into the world and make a living and a home for her. Then she would consider.

But Hiram Chester was matter of fact. He had known too many of the young men of the lake who had become dissatisfied with the life of their fathers and grandfathers. They had gone into civilization, and the majority of them had confessed themselves failures in the big world, and had been only too glad to come home again to their mother forest.

"I'm not ashamed to be a guide, Carrie," Hi would say when they argued on the great obstacle to their marriage. "It's a natural life. Man wasn't born to live cooped up in cities and tear his life out in one long scramble to get ahead." (Hi had never been further toward the busy life than Carthage.) "What do city people come up here for? They want rest and big air. Why, Carrie, if you and I'd go to a city and live, we'd smother to death. No green trees, no water like that lake out yonder, no nothing, but noise and brick and stone."

Hiram's arguments were good, no doubt, but when a woman's mind is made up, and backed by a strong ambition, not even the persuasive reasonings of a Demosthenes or a Webster can avail aught against her own private opinion.

Thus was Hiram Chester held in suspense for a year and a half. He could do nothing but plead and wait during all that time. Then a new obstacle to the fulfilment of his hopes appeared in the person of Tom Jameson.

That individual was well known to the inhabitants about the foot of Cran-

berry Lake, who frequently made the trip over the road through the woods to Newton Falls. Tom had been in the paper mill there, and for a while had enjoyed the reputation of being one of the brightest hands employed by the company.

Then that quality of his make up, which has blighted the future of many a man in a higher position in this world's affairs, ambition, cropped out, and Jameson received his walking papers one morning for instigating a strike among his fellow workers for higher wages.

Tom Jameson naturally drifted back to the home of his boyhood, Cranberry Lake. But he carried his boundless ambition with him.

He said he was only going to be a guide until he could get something better to do outside the woods; but it was not in Tom's nature to sit down and wait until that something turned up. His reputation as a master of wood craft grew, and the hunters that year found in him a capital guide.

Hi Chester up to that time had been considered by the people of Harewood and the settlement's sportsmen visitors to be the best man on the lake with whom to camp and hunt and fish; so when Tom Jameson put in his bid as the best guide, the rivalry between the two men commenced.

Then there was soon a second cause of rivalry between Hi and Tom.

When Tom was a little fellow he had been a great favorite of the late Mrs. White, and now that he had come back home again, old Bob liked to have Tom come to see him and talk of his dead wife.

But Tom soon found another interest at the log hut near Umstead Landing in that woodland beauty, Carrie White. When the girl had come to know Tom, she had straightway found that he possessed the same desire which was always uppermost in her mind, an ambition to be somebody besides a dweller in the wilderness.

At first, the man charmed the girl with tales of the life in the world without. He told her of what he wanted to be, how he was going to leave the lake as soon as a certain city sportsman, whom he had guided that spring, found a position for him in his works at Syracuse. And finally he had asked Carrie to quit her old home and marry him and go out into real life and live.

Carrie White would undoubtedly have complied with the wishes of her new lover if it had not been for the old affection she still had in her heart for Hiram Chester. She confessed to herself very often that she knew that Hiram was the better man of the two. He was fair and honest, whereas Tom was getting the reputation down at Bishop's of being a little too sharp in his transactions.

So the girl was in a quandary. Her heart declared for her old flame, but her ambition tried to convince her that her life's desire would be satisfied by marrying Tom Jameson and going to live in a city.

When Tom came up the lake, then, the morning after Randolph Bancroft had told the news to Hiram Chester, and announced that he had been appointed a game constable, the old feeling towards Hi was forgotten, and then and there she pledged her heart to Tom Jameson.

As soon as they could, the two planned, they would get married and leave the hated woods for ever.

Hi came up to the Landing that afternoon, and stopped in at old Bob's home. When Carrie asked him if he had heard the news, he colored up and expressed the same opinion as Ab Thompson, that "Tom had only been made constable so that he could catch Hi for killing deer out of season and land him in jail."

The girl naturally defended the man to whom she had so lately plighted her troth, and said further:

"Hi, if you'd only brace up and be somebody like Tom, you'd please every one who cares for you a great deal more than doing as you do, just taking life easy."

"But, Carrie, I work hard winter and summer."

"Yes, but why weren't you made constable?" returned the girl.

"Because I kill deer out of season, that's why." Hi looked down at the girl beside him with just a bit of the outlaw's bravado in the expression of his face. "You don't like me no less for that, do you, Carrie?"

She couldn't help smiling at the honest look of trust, for the thought passed through her mind that this law breaker was confessing his misdeeds to the promised wife of a game constable.

Hiram mistook the smile for one of encouragement in his lawless shooting and went on:

"What would Tom say if he knew what I'm going to do tonight. I've made a salt lick back near Toad Pond. Making licks is against the law, you know. Then I'm going to watch there tonight with a jacklight. That's also against the law. Thirdly, as the judge would say, if I was caught, which I won't do, I'll be shooting out of season, and, lastly, I'm going to use buckshot. Now, how's that for a combination of busting the shooting laws?" and Hiram threw back his head and laughed in his hearty, whole souled way.

Carrie didn't laugh. She sat still looking out up the lake, thinking the only evil thought that ever came into the girl's mind.

She tried to make it her duty to tell Tom of what Hi was going to do that night, but she knew perfectly, the word duty only concealed the idea that if Tom caught Hiram, the latter could not come into her life with that true blue nature of his that she couldn't help loving, until she was married and had closed her heart to the old love forever.

"What the matter, Carrie? You look as if I'd been caught and was being locked up for a year. Don't you want me to do it?"

In her soul the girl wanted to warn the lad against the risk he was going to take that night, but she crushed her natural impulse with the words:

"Yes, I do," "for then Tom'll catch you," she said to herself. Then aloud again: "But what do you want to take all that trouble for? Don't you kill enough in the daytime?"

"Yes, but I've been seeing big bucks' tracks up near Toad. Then, since Tom's a constable, it'll be better not to hunt in the daytime with the chances of meeting him and accidentally mistaking him for a deer, you know," and a knowing look came into Hiram's eyes.

"What! Hi Chester, do you mean that you'd be a murderer, besides the worst breaker of the law on the lake? Then you call yourself a fair man, and

come a courtin' of a girl with threats like this." Carrie White's eyes flashed scornfully.

"Sho, you needn't get so het up about what I said, girl. I was only a little riled about Tom's coming up here so much and trying to win you from me."

The woman stood up and faced her old love.

"Hiram Chester," she said, "Tom Jameson don't have to come courting me any more; for I've promised to be his wife, and we're going to get married just as quick as we can."

She expected this announcement would open the flood gates of Hiram's long pent up feelings against his rival; but the girl was disappointed. She didn't know how deeply the man cared for her. The real meaning of her words had not yet penetrated to his innermost feeling.

All that he did was to get up slowly. He put out his hand to Carrie and said "Good by" in a low voice. Then he walked across the clearing before the little log house, and as he disappeared down the trail in the direction of his boat the girl noticed that he dragged his feet as if he were wearied by a long journey.

Carrie White didn't have a chance to think of what had happened. The bushes at the other side of the clearing parted, and Tom Jameson stepped out.

The idea flashed through her mind that it was mean of Tom to hide himself and overhear what had taken place between the old lovers. It seemed to her that Tom did not trust her as a true man should trust the woman who was to be his wife.

"So you told him, did you? I guess he'll steer clear of this place for a while. He won't get the chance any way. I heard what he's going to do tonight, and he'll be sent up for some time when I catch him." Tom came and took the seat outside the cottage door that Hi had just left.

Carrie somehow felt relieved that she did not have to perform what she thought was her duty by telling her constable lover of what Hiram was going to do that night.

"And he threatens to mistake me for a deer, does he?" Tom went on. "He's a nice one to come making love to a decent girl, he is. I'll land him where he ought to be."

Carrie agreed with Tom. He was the hand of the law now, and she was glad that the lawbreaker, Hiram Chester, was gone. Right was on their side, and she could marry this man without her conscience pricking her.

But somehow that evening after supper, when her father had lighted his pipe and sat up before the open fire, Carrie was very restless. She could not sit down and sew. She found no interest in the papers that Tom had brought in from the Falls for her to read.

Perhaps it was the storm clouds that were piling themselves up over the top of Bear Mountain which made her go to the window so often and peer out into the coming darkness. Perhaps, too, it was the thought that two men were out there in the forest, armed, and with hate in their hearts for each other.

Her father noticed her uneasiness and asked the girl what ailed her. Only then did she take up the paper and read the old man to sleep.

* * * * *

Hi Chester arrived at the lick he had made about five o'clock in the evening. He swung his pack from his back and took from it a couple of blankets and laid them on the ground. Then he trimmed the light of his jack and tried the leather cap on his head to see if it fitted properly. Afterwards he ate his cold supper.

Finally he slipped a couple of shells into his gun and lay down to wait until it was dark.

Only then did he hear the rumblings of the storm.

"No buck for me tonight," he said to himself, "but perhaps the rain'll keep off and go to the north." So he decided to stay.

It was the first time since he had left Carrie that he had had a chance to think of what had taken place. Now, while he lay there in the deepening shadows of the woods, he realized the true significance of his loss. Everything he had done for the last two years had for its motive the pleasing of Carrie. What if his word was as good as an oath on the Bible, what if he hadn't been foul mouthed and bad as some fellows he knew, what if he had saved as much as he had been able and had it salted away in the bank at the Falls?

There was nothing in life for him now. Never before had he felt lonely in the woods, but now the silence that stole down with the dark seemed to him the silence of eternity, and his heart beat with a fright that he had not known since he was only a little chap, and was lost in the woods.

A branch cracked near by, and he looked up and held his breath for fear it would be heard. The buck was coming in. He cocked his gun noiselessly and looked around. There was light enough yet for him to see a mark as near as the lick, and he raised his piece to his shoulder.

"Queer," he murmured. "Something moved then. Perhaps it was only a hedgehog," and he sank back quietly and lit his jack. He put it on his head and waited again.

It grew pitch dark. Still Chester sat there, his thoughts occupied completely with the news that Carrie White had told him that day.

There was not a breath of air stirring, and every woodsman's sign portended the breaking of a storm. But the thunder had ceased over by Bear Mountain, and Hi could catch a glimpse of a bright star between the leaves of the trees overhead.

At last in the distance came the long expected sound. There was the noise of the crackling of twigs to the right. The buck was surely coming into the lick this time. The watcher put his hand carefully up to his jack to feel if it was burning properly, and loosened the blind so that it would come off easily.

The noise grew louder and louder. Then it stopped for a minute, as did Hi's heart. Old hunter as he was the excitement of jacking always made him tremble until the jack shone forth upon the game and his eye was along the barrel of his gun.

Had the buck smelled him? What air there was now was blowing from

the deer. Hiram wondered if he dared risk a shot at that distance before the animal would blow and be off.

Once more the crackling began and came nearer. Now the buck was coming up to the lick. He'd be right in range by the time Hi could focus his light on him. The man's hand went up carefully to the front of the jack, and a second later a broad beam shot through the darkness between him and the lick.

Chester's finger was on the front trigger of his gun, and he was swinging both it and the light on the object when right across the hollow there appeared another light, and the voice of his enemy, Tom Jameson, yelled out :

"Hi Chester drop that gun. You're my prisoner!"

Before Chester knew what had happened his light flashed on the object that had just come in view. Carrie White was standing beside the salted log. Her face was turned towards him, and her arms were outstretched.

"Hi, Hi; for the love of God, run. Tom Jameson is here and he's come to arrest you!"

Then there were two flashes of fire and two reports from the other side of the lick. Hiram felt a burning pain in his shoulder, and then he fell down and lost consciousness.

When he awoke the wind was coming down through the hollow with frightful force. He tried to raise himself on his right hand, but he fell back, and there was no feeling in that arm at all.

Bright flashes of lightning illuminated the woods, and the hills trembled under the blows of the thunder. He tried to think where he was. He rubbed his face with his left hand and leaned against the rock back of him to collect his senses. Then, as an extra brilliant stroke of lightning impressed on his senses an instantaneous picture of the salted log, and the little hill on the other side, the whole truth came back to him.

Wounded as he was, with his shoulder paining him so that he groaned aloud, the man arose and lighted his jack again from a dry match that he found under a blanket. Then he made his way slowly down into the lick and looked around as if he was searching for something

"Not here. Not here!" He shook his head slowly. "And she came to tell me that Tom was watching for me. He has taken my Carrie and gone away. They've gone to be married, and I'm all alone."

The pain of the wound had driven the man out of his head, and he sobbed softly like a tired child as he mounted the other side of the hollow and found a blanket and a guide's pack. On the back of the wicker basket was painted two big black letters, T. J.

"Tom Jameson," the man repeated over and over again. He had still clung to his gun, and he fired both barrels at the pack. Then he turned, and using the gun as a support, he hunted around until he found the trail.

The storm was now fully upon Hiram Chester as he made his way painfully towards the lake. The overloaded trees dripped streams of water upon him. The branches of the bushes cut him cruelly as the wind whipped them back and forth, and the whole woods vibrated with the din of thunder and falling trees.

The lightning made his path as light as day. Twice he had to leave the trail to avoid climbing over a tree that had been blown down.

How he ever reached the end of the Umstead trail Hi never knew. It seemed days ago since he left the lick, and the tragic happening that had occurred there that night seemed almost lost in the past. His only thought was to reach old man White's house and tell him that Tom Jameson had stolen away his Carrie. And when a light finally gleamed out of the darkness, Hiram broke into a trot, even though every step seemed to wrench his arm and shoulder from his body.

He passed the window and noticed that there was a lighted lamp on the sill. He fell heavily against the door and kicked, as he shouted:

"White, White; let me in; it's Hi."

The door was opened quickly. He staggered into the room and dropped on a bed of pine boughs.

"White," he gasped, "Tom Jameson has run off with Carrie. I went out to watch tonight for deer, and some scoundrel was false to me and told him that I was going to be there. Carrie found this out and came in the dark to warn me, at the risk of being shot. Tom shot me here—never mind it now. Wait until I finish telling you—and then I didn't know no more till just a while ago. Then I came down the trail to tell you."

A gentler hand than old man White's passed over the wounded man's face, and the voice he loved came to him just as he fainted:

"Tom Jameson didn't run off with me, Hi, dear, and I ain't going to marry him at all. Live here all my life with you is what I'm going to do, for you're my own true Hiram."

The woman stooped over and kissed him, and his hand grasped hers.

A LITTLE LOVE SONG.

My heart was like a sunless, cold,
Unlovely land of ice and snow,
Wherein no blessed buds unfold,
Nor singing waters flow.

But all at once the April skies
Laughed in your look, and at that hour
My spirit melted, torrent wise,
My life broke into flower!

Oh, dearest heart, I had not guessed
What marvel of immortal seeds
Lay hidden deep within my breast,
Beneath its barren weeds!

But now I know, but now I know
The glory of the flower of love,
The joyous splendor of its glow,
The subtle pain thereof!

Evaleen Stein.

IN PERILOUS WAYS.*

BY WILLIAM W. RUSS.

The story of a knight errant's peculiar mission—Exciting experiences of war time in Mexico—
Fighting against heavy odds with friends at times indistinguishable from foes.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

After a few years of roving Maxwell Harvey, who tells the story, finds himself in El Paso, where chance brings him the acquaintance of Philip Melrose, a man from New York City well on in years. Having reason to know Harvey as a fellow possessed of courage and determination, Melrose commissions him in a peculiar service—nothing less than the kidnapping of his niece from her stepfather in the city of Mexico. She is the daughter of Melrose's brother, now dead, who married a Mexican during his consulship; the girl has spent much of her time in the East at school under her uncle's care, and now, knowing that her stepfather is trying to gain possession of her fortune, the old gentleman seeks aid in getting her away entirely from her present environment.

Taking for his companion Theodore Martin, a young doctor out of patients, Harvey sets out for the capital of Mexico, which he reaches after many vicissitudes by the way, for it is a time of civil war. He discovers the house of Don Carlos, where the girl is kept under surveillance, and then, in the hope of learning something useful in regard to it and its master, he makes himself at home in a wine shop near by, seeking to gain a friendly footing with its frequenters by playing cards with a party of them. After losing steadily he wins twice, whereupon one of the fellows accuses him of cheating. "It's a lie!" Harvey cries, the men draw knives, and then he calls for fair play, declaring that he will take any one of them alone.

CHAPTER VI.—KNIFE TO KNIFE.

I HAD my hand on my revolver, but did not draw. There was enough of the bravo among the fellows not to fear meeting me single handed, and each one was ready enough to make the quarrel his own. But for all that they threatened to fall upon me all together.

The keeper of the house saw how things stood, and was no doubt fair minded enough for one of his class, willing that a man should be killed in a fair fight, but not murdered without first being given a chance for his life. No doubt thinking that one of the bullies could deal with me single handed, he now decreed that the affair should be settled between two of us.

The fellow who had accused me of cheating was willing enough to agree to this, and insisted that his companions stand back.

"I will show you that a man cannot tell me to my face that I lie," he hissed.

"You first accused me of cheating," I replied coolly.

"You know that you are a cheat! You came here to beat us!" he replied.

He was fairly furious, clutching at his knife, and pushing the other men back. "Leave the American to me!" he cried. "I will do with him! I will do with him!"

**This story began in the November issue of THE ARGOSY, which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.*

They fell back, though I could see that they were anxious enough to have a hand in the affair. The floor was cleared, leaving an open space in the center of the room. It had all occurred so suddenly, and preparations were made so quickly, that it seemed like some prearranged plan.

There was no escape for me. The Mexican was glaring at me, waiting for an opportunity, as it seemed, to spring at my throat. Realizing how unjustly I had been accused, suddenly I seemed to be seized with a paroxysm of anger.

"Now!" I cried. "Come on, you coward, you lying knave!"

My words maddened him. Nor did I care much. He sprang at me like a wild animal, but I warded off the blow which he drove at me, hurling him from me.

"Come on, come on; what are you waiting for?" I cried again.

But I had not long to wait. He was upon me again in a thrice, but I caught his arm and would have bent him to the floor had it not been that I feared a knife thrust from one of his associates. We merely shuffled over the floor, and he broke away.

I had pitted my strength against his, and knew that I was the stronger. I was cool, as I have always been when in immediate danger, but it was different with my opponent, who took the offensive, attacking me with a madness which rendered him incapable of making use of any advantage he might be able to obtain over me.

I was armed with a short knife, as also was the Mexican, but of its use in a hand to hand encounter I knew little. Had we been armed with swords I would have felt more confident of success.

Though the sword is not a weapon that comes into very active service at this day, when firearms make a potent fighter of any weak kneed fellow, yet I had been drilled in its use when at the military academy, and had afterwards kept up my practice to a certain extent.

Whether or not I could now bring my knowledge of the use of the small sword into active service to assist me in a fight with knives, I had not been at all certain. At least I knew something of how to keep my guard, and was cool and calculating.

The proprietor of the place had closed and locked the door behind me. My chance of getting out of the place alive was indeed very small. But come the worst, I would not die a coward.

Quick as a flash, again my adversary sprang at me. I was prepared for him, and this time met him half way across the floor.

If he had thought to surprise me, he himself had been surprised in finding me so ready to meet him. He slashed a little wildly, as I thought, and then drew back, having barely touched my clothes.

I saw that the fellow expected to take me off my guard. He was cunning, but he had none of the adroitness of a skilful fencer, neither was he cool and calculating, though he was not lacking in nerve and courage. His mode of fighting was to dart at me suddenly, and then cut and slash at close quarters, depending upon a sudden and audacious attack to gain an advantage over me.

I avoided his knife by quick sidewise movements, and then met him with

my own point, so he could not close. By taking the defensive I found that I was able to avoid or parry his thrusts. I also had the advantage of him in reach of arms. Had we been provided with swords I would have had him at my mercy from the first.

He now tried to strike down my knife, but we only crossed blades, our knives rasping together. Again and again he came at me swiftly, but I pricked him two or three times, which caused him to be more cautious.

He made a feint to strike below my belt, but I saw what he was trying to do and prevented him from closing, but he brought his knife around in such a way as to give me a savage cut on my left arm. My buckskin jacket saved me from being severely wounded, but I felt the warm blood trickle down my sleeve.

Again he rushed at me, but I had no relish for having my throat cut, and kept him off, pricking him on the shoulder. It was a trifling injury, but it maddened him and he came at me again, and with such fury that I was forced back a step or two.

"Give him the knife," I heard one of the men say, but they kept their distance and did not interfere.

I was well aware, though, that victory for me would but save me for the knives of the other fellows; and even as I stood face to face with the Mexican, saw the hatred in his eyes, his set features and heavy breathing, and knew that he meant to kill me, I was formulating a plan of escape.

Assuming to weaken, I let him press me hard. I lost ground. The fellows back of me gave way that I might be pushed to the wall. I had been aware that they felt that I was gaining an advantage, and now the reaction came to those looking on and they thought they saw me defeated, as also did my opponent.

To deceive them I made my passes wildly—I was not holding my own, so it looked, but the truth was, I was but awaiting my opportunity.

It came when the Mexican made a vicious thrust at my throat. I stepped back quickly, avoiding the blow, and before he could recover himself I struck the knife out of his hand and followed this quickly with a high chest thrust. He staggered, took a step backward, and fell heavily on the floor.

Before those in the room could recover from their surprise at the sudden ending of the affair, I drew my revolvers. They had proven cumbersome enough during the fight, but now I had the opportunity to make good use of them.

"Throw up your hands!" I cried.

The order was obeyed. Probably more from the suddenness with which it had been given than from fear. They were all before me, huddled together, a cowed looking set of fellows, and between us, stretched upon the floor, was the man I had run the knife into, apparently dead, the knife undrawn.

"Now," I said, still covering them with my leveled revolvers, "if you will oblige me by not making it necessary that I shoot the whole rascally lot of you, I will get out of here and leave you to take care of your man."

They did not offer any resistance, nor did they make any reply. I stood aside a little from the door toward which I had backed, and told the boy, who

had remained there all the while, gazing at the scene with wide open eyes, to unlock the door.

He looked at me, then at the proprietor, trembling as if he expected to be immediately killed.

"Unlock the door!" I demanded a second time.

The boy suddenly came to his senses, but with a strange expression of awe on his face, and moved sidewise to the door, his eyes fixed on me. He turned the key, threw open the door, and then darted back into the center of the room.

I took the key from the lock, and put it on the outside, taking care to keep my eyes on the men in the room all the while.

As I backed out of the doorway, relaxing my gaze for a moment, there was a slight movement among them—one of the men coughed, and another dropped his hands. They were like wild animals in a cage. I could hold them under my subjection only as long as I had my eyes fastened upon them. But in an instant I had brought the door to, and turned the key.

As I had expected, there was rush at the door, but they found it locked. Then there were cries and curses. I did not wait. They would be after me, the whole lot of them, but I had gained a few seconds' start.

CHAPTER VII.—A NIGHT'S ADVENTURE.

As I left the house I crossed the street, which, fortunately for me, was deserted at this point, though it could not have been much later than nine o'clock. I then hurried on a short distance until I came to the house where Don Carlos lived.

I had no more than passed within the shadow of the building than I saw two of the men I had locked in the *pulqueria* come around the corner in front of me. Immediately afterwards two others issued from a doorway in the house adjoining the Los Toros de Muerte.

Both parties met at the corner, and stopped. It was very evident that they had planned to intercept me, and not seeing me anywhere, were in a quandary as to which way I had turned.

There was a hurried consultation, and then they separated, two of them going one way and two another. I could see by the light of the street lantern that one of them was armed with a rifle, and that the others had pistols.

The fellow with the rifle and his companion crossed over to the side of the street I was on. I heard them stop for a moment or two, but very soon they came down the street directly toward the place where I was standing.

I stood close up against the wall and under the shadow of a balcony, so that I could not be easily seen until they were right upon me. As they came nearer I thought it prudent to step under the arch of the doorway.

The door set in from the wall of the building somewhat. I was surprised to find that it yielded to my touch and opened when I pushed against it. Seemingly, this was my chance for escape. I stepped inside and closed the door behind me just as my pursuers came along, poking their guns into every nook and corner.

I waited until I had the satisfaction of hearing them pass on, then attempted to go out, but found that I could not now open the door.

The archway to which the door admitted me was large enough for a coach and horses to pass through, and led to the inner court or *patio*. The place was dark, for the lamp above my head had not been lit; but the *patio* was lighted by lanterns. Why the *portero* was not at the door, I did not know.

My attention had been attracted from the first by the sound of voices and rattle of arms. At the further end of the court was a company of troopers. They stood there holding their horses and apparently awaiting orders.

There were also numerous servants about the place, and everywhere there appeared to be excitement and confusion. There were, probably, over fifty persons in the courtyard.

I crept along the side of the wall to get a better view, and discover, if I could, the cause of the tumult; but I was unable to arrive at any satisfactory explanation as to what was the cause of it. I could not see Don Carlos anywhere, and it finally occurred to me that probably the cavalrymen were waiting for him, and served as a bodyguard or escort.

An attendant passed me, coming down a stairway which was at my left. He did not see me, and I thought that I might venture to ascend the same stairway, and possibly, in the confusion which seemed to prevail everywhere, find the señorita's room, or at least manage to communicate with her.

If seen, I might pass as one of the troopers, as I wore a sombrero not unlike those they had, and the difference in my clothes was not likely to be noticed in the shadow of the gallery. Plants and vines had been trained along the balustrade and up the columns which screened the gallery from the court.

Watching my opportunity, when there was no one near, I went up the stairs, keeping to the left, and passed half the length of the second gallery, fortunately not meeting any one. I was in some doubt which door I should venture to enter as leading to the room where I was most likely to find the señorita, when suddenly a door opened near me and a servant appeared.

He was a young man, and stopped abruptly, looking at me with a fixed stare. He was about to speak, but I forestalled him.

"Pardon me," I said, bowing low, "I am at a loss which way to turn. Don Carlos' room is——" I hesitated, as if following directions, but had become confused.

"You wish to see Señor Don Carlos de Ulloa?" he asked, with dignified reserve.

I did not wish to see him—in fact, he was the very person I wished to avoid meeting, but I was caught in my own trap. I replied, however, that I wished to see him privately, upon a matter of particular importance.

I now fully expected that I would be obliged to meet that gentleman; and I was frantically racking my brain for some excuse to account for my presence in his house and my request for an interview.

The man waited until I was through speaking, regarding me with some disfavor, I thought, and then replied that Don Carlos was not at home.

I must have breathed a sigh of relief. Certainly I felt greatly relieved. My most immediate peril did not threaten me.

"When will he return?" I made bold to ask.

"He is expected at any moment."

My triumph had been of short duration. My heart again sank within me, but I determined to make the most of my time, and of my opportunities.

I thrust a coin into the fellow's hand. It was a gold piece—one of those I had raked into my pocket when I threw down my hand at the gaming table. It served its purpose. He looked at it, saw the amount, and was so well pleased that he was quite thrown off his guard.

"Will señor be so kind as to wait?" he inquired, bowing.

"I will wait," I said. "When he comes, bring him to me. Never mind my name. He will understand. I do not want it known that I am here. This room in front of me is——"

"Is occupied by Señora Don Carlos de Ulloa."

"Yes, to be sure," I said. "I mean the one to the left."

"That is Don Carlos' room. But you can wait in the reception room. There is no one there," he explained.

I did not dare to question him further for fear of awakening suspicion. He led the way to a room near at hand, opened the door for me, and stood aside for me to enter.

"You are sure that I will not have long to wait?" I asked.

"Don Carlos is expected to join his regiment. He has only gone to receive orders. He may be detained longer than he expected," replied the fellow.

"I understand," I said, motioning for him to go. "I will wait."

He bowed and then retired.

As soon as he had passed down the stairway I quietly slipped out of the door and along the gallery until I came to the corner room, the one I had taken to be Señorita Teresa's.

I hesitated. It seemed a desecration for me to enter her chamber. Yet, I must endeavor to see her, even at the risk of her denouncing me for my boldness, for at times like this a person does not stand on propriety and stop to argue points of etiquette.

The door was unlatched, and I pushed it open silently and went in. The room was dimly lighted by a candle. It was plainly furnished, and in one corner was a bed.

Before I could take in all my surroundings I was startled by a woman's cry, and an old duenna rose from a chair. She was such a little woman, and being clad in black it was not strange that I did not at first see her.

"I beg pardon," I said, endeavoring to calm her fears, "I have made a mistake."

"Then why do you not go?" she demanded, standing trembling before me. "You must know that it is not becoming in a gentleman to enter unbidden a lady's chamber. There is the door!" And she pointed to it.

"Yes," I said, "I will go. But first, my business may be with you, if you will allow me a word."

I had closed the door, and seeing a bolt on the inside, shoved it in place. I believed that my greatest danger was from the outside.

"Señor!" she exclaimed, hardly able to speak from agitation. "What do you want here?"

I was aware that in appearance I looked more like a ruffian than I did a gentleman. The *peon* had taken me to be a soldier. What would this woman think of me?

I was armed, as she could see. My jacket was cut in several places, and also stained with blood, but it was no time to stand on appearances.

"My good woman will bear with me, I am certain, when I tell her that I have just narrowly escaped being cut to pieces by a gang of ruffians," I said, appealing to her sympathy. "There is nothing to be feared from me. I will not lift a finger to harm you. You command, not me."

"Do you belong to the guard?" she asked.

"No," I replied.

"How came you to be admitted to the house? Where was the *portero*?" she demanded.

"Circumstances—a mere accident admitted me. I have not time to explain. I am an American, as you may have perceived, but I come here with the best of intentions."

Instead of shrinking away from me, as I half expected that she would do, when I said that I was an American her fears seemed to leave her, and she answered me in very good English.

"My old master was an American. He was a good man. My young mistress, Señorita Teresa, is his daughter."

Surely good fortune was favoring me. If I could gain her confidence she might assist me in my undertaking. I threw off restraint, forgot discretion, and spoke with more openness and confidence than good judgment and prudence would have warranted.

"You may have surmised before this," I made bold to say, "that I come here to see Señorita Teresa."

"No, no, señor," she replied, quickly. "You must not try to see Señorita Teresa. It would be madness. Your blood would be upon your own head. I beg of you, señor, you will not try to see her."

She was upon her knees, earnestly pleading with me. I took her hand, and helped her to rise.

"Fear not for me," I said. "I have met danger before this. I must see your mistress, and you will assist me in doing so, I know. It is very important that I should see her."

"Yes, señor," she replied quickly. "You come from her uncle, Señor Melrose. He would have her go and live with him, but it is impossible. He will be killed if he persists. I warned him. I warn you."

"It is not impossible, with your help," I answered. "Think, you can make your mistress' life happy. You can save her from being imprisoned in a convent, or married to some man she does not love."

"If I could," she cried, wringing her hands. "But there is no escape—not now. For her sake, señor, don't attempt anything. You will be discovered, and then my lady—she will surely be sent to the convent and I will see her no more."

"Be calm," I replied coolly. "I only ask to see her. If I am not permitted to see her, then I will not answer for what may happen."

"No, señor, you cannot go to her—she—it may be I can arrange. Will you wait here?" she asked, trembling with excitement.

I hesitated. I did not know what she might not do, but I felt that I could trust her. Besides, there seemed to be no alternative.

"I will wait if you are not too long," I replied, sitting down, and with an attempt at calmness which but ill concealed the inward emotion I felt.

Accidentally my hand touched the empty sheath where I had carried my knife, and a shudder crept over me. I had escaped one danger, but could I hope to escape the present one?

She looked at me curiously. "You know that the *patio* is crowded with the guard?" she said, still hesitating.

"I saw them," I replied.

She left me and passed out of the room by a side door, which I knew must open into the room adjoining the one I was in.

If I had thus far borne myself with apparent composure it was not because I felt at ease. It was with almost an agony of suspense that I waited for the duenna to return. I knew not whether she had gone to speak to her mistress, or to summon the guard. It would have been quite reasonable to presume the latter.

I could distinctly hear voices outside, and some one walked along the gallery past the door. I calculated my chances for escape should I be discovered—I even went to the window and examined the iron grating. It would have done service for a jail, so strong was it. I went to the door and listened; but there was nothing unusual in the sounds I heard. Suddenly I became conscious that I was not alone, and looking around, saw the señorita standing just within the side door, her eyes fixed intently upon me.

It did not surprise me that it was the same young lady I had seen on the plaza. I had expected this.

"Pardon me," I managed to say, "this is Señorita Teresa de Ulloa?"

"The same," she replied. "You wish to see me?"

She stood before me a very queen in dignity and beauty. Her dress was white, the skirt long and full, and she wore about her shoulders an embroidered scarf. Her hair was loose, and fell in soft brown curls upon her shoulders. Her feet were clad in satin sandals—one dainty foot showing just beyond her skirt. I could not see her eyes on account of the dim light in the room, but I seemed to feel them.

I was all confusion—all unnerved. No sudden danger, not even the appearance of the guard, could have unmanned me as did the presence of this one fair woman.

"My name is Maxwell Harvey," I stammered. "I have the honor of enjoying the friendship and confidence of your uncle, Philip Melrose."

"A friend of my uncle I would willingly welcome, but——" She hesitated and then stepped forward, extending her hand.

I took it and thanked her for the honor she did me.

"Do you realize your danger?" she continued.

"I do," I replied, "but I do not fear danger."

"It might be better if you did, for then you would never have come here, for you come at the peril of your life."

"My being here tonight is an accident," I explained. "Let us consider it a fortunate one. I have something to say to you, and where else could I have found opportunity for saying it?"

"I do not know," she replied, with a deep drawn sigh, "but you will have to speak briefly, for your time must be cut very short."

I started, but her smile reassured me. She would never be guilty of treachery.

"I come as the representative of your uncle," I continued. "You are, I believe, his nearest relative."

"Even so, Mr. Harvey. But he is not in the city, is he?" she asked, showing a sudden alarm.

"He is in the city, but, as he believes, his presence is unknown save to myself," I replied.

"Oh, why did he come? He will be discovered! He cannot long conceal his identity!"

"Do not fear for his safety," I said, somewhat moved by her distress. "It is your own welfare and happiness that is of first importance. He will look out for himself."

She had clasped her hands together, and what may have been her thoughts, I could not know, only that she was deeply agitated.

"He should not have come," she cried. "It is attempting too much for me."

"He did not come," I replied. "He sent me, and wished me to assure you that he will leave nothing undone which may assist in securing your release. I am at your service. Your uncle wished me to bring you to him. Will you come with me?"

She started, and seemed to shrink away from me. I felt very much as a rejected suitor would have felt, having offered his heart and hand and had them refused.

At least, I suppose I did. I had never had that experience, but could imagine what it was like. My knees were unsteady, and my heart beat with truly alarming force and rapidity. It seemed to take away my breath.

"How can I go with you?" she asked, in a most matter of fact kind of way which somewhat brought me to myself again.

"Is it possible for you to leave the house unseen—in disguise, if need be?"

She smiled faintly.

"No, not even possible," she said, and looked significantly at the grated windows. Then she turned to me, with something like a gleam of hope in her eyes. "But you will save me—anything rather than a convent."

"I pledge my life that I will save you," I cried.

"Hist, do not speak so loud," she cautioned me. "Oh, you do not know what you are saying, and I should not have asked it of you," she moaned. "It is impossible, for I am too closely guarded. It was by the rarest chance that you gained admission here. At no other time could you have done so

without being discovered. Should I attempt to escape it would be found out, and you would be killed. Oh, why did you come! Why did you come!"

She cried out passionately, and I saw how unhappy she was. So much was I affected that I would have risked a hundred dangers, rather than have left her to be a prisoner where she was, or to be sent to the convent, had she been willing to accompany me.

"Señorita Teresa," I cried, "trust me. I will accomplish everything."

Almost instantly she changed, turning quickly upon me. "How do I know that you are not deceiving me?" she demanded.

I was not prepared to encounter this turn of affairs, and stammered something about being a gentleman, and that as her uncle, Philip Melrose, had seen fit to trust me, and had assured me that she would know that he sent me, she also should be willing to take me on faith.

"You do not look altogether bad," she replied.

"On the other hand, I think that I present a very poor appearance," I said, glancing down at my clothes.

"Never mind," she answered quickly. "It does not matter. It would be impossible for me to escape, even could we leave the house unseen. My stepfather is high in authority, and as soon as it was discovered that I was gone he would have the police on our track. We could not escape them. Oh, it is impossible, impossible! I am a prisoner, and these walls are my prison. You are rash. You venture upon that of which you have no knowledge. Even now I doubt not that your presence here is known. You must have been seen. You must fly, fly for your life. Who can help you, I do not know. Why did you come? You will be killed. Already I fear it is too late. There, did you not hear the door?" she asked, listening. "Don Carlos has returned, and he will find you here. Oh, leave me, if you can escape, I beg of you. Do not think of me, for you can do nothing for me. Go, go, I beg of you; go!"

She spoke fast and earnestly, pouring out her words in a torrent, pleading for me to save myself. But I felt no alarm for my own safety. It was only for her.

I touched her hand to reassure her that I feared nothing, but she shrank back from me. I did not understand it so well then, or it did not occur to me that the custom with the best families was that a girl before she is married is never left alone in company with a gentleman, and it was probably this, having been brought up in seclusion, that caused her to withdraw her hand. It might, too, have been partly from her anxiety that I should escape, but I mistook its significance.

"You will not let me rescue you, then?" I asked.

"Oh, Señor Harvey, if it were possible. You will rescue me—when—how—where?"

I was about to make reply, but was startled by hearing steps outside of men coming along the gallery. I could tell they were men by the sound of their heavy boots.

"Oh, he is coming, and some of the guard is with him. They will find you. Your escape is cut off!" she cried.

"My answer," I said. "Will you trust yourself to my care if I find a way?"

"Yes, if you can find a way, but how can you escape them?"

She did not wait for my answer, but whispered hoarsely, "Come, come," beckoning for me to follow her.

The door to the other room was open, and the duenna came in, excited and much alarmed. She would have prevented my passing through the door to this room, but I pushed her gently aside and whispered for her to hold the outer door as long as she could.

I had scarcely passed by her when there were loud raps; and a man's voice demanded that he be admitted to the room.

Señorita Teresa had preceded me, and she now quickly closed the door between the two rooms, and fastened it.

"I may be able to prevent their coming in here. It is my room," she explained, placing her back against the door.

The apartment was dimly lighted by wax candles. One swift glance and I saw that it was richly and daintily furnished. A bed was covered with a silk puff, and the pillow cases and coverlet were of embroidered linen and white lace. Beside the bed was a velvet ottoman, upon which lay some gowns. The floor was covered with soft rugs, and pervading all was an atmosphere of purity and sweet fragrance which, under other circumstances, would have restrained my unhallowed feet from venturing within its sacred precincts.

I could have fallen upon my knees and worshiped this noble, self sacrificing woman, when I realized how much she was risking to save me. To stay and compromise her honor, I could not. I would not be found in her room. I must escape.

Quickly I passed to the window. It would not yield. I was in desperation. I felt a small hand on my arm. "The other window," she said.

The other window yielded, and I felt the cool evening air against my cheeks, but the señorita's hand was still upon my arm, as if she would restrain me. This window, as I saw, opened on a balcony.

"The distance is too great. You will be killed," she whispered.

At the same moment there were loud demands made that the outer door be opened. She heard the men, and her grasp upon my arm tightened.

I cannot describe what a thrill that little hand sent through me. Had I a hundred lives, they would all have been laid down for her service, but I was only one against many, and I must save her. And if I saved her it must be at another time. For a moment I hesitated, but there was no alternative. I must escape, and I could not take her with me.

"Fear not but that I will find a way to rescue you," I said as I hesitated.

She let me take both her hands in mine, and for an instant our eyes met, and then I slipped through the window to the balcony.

It was time I was away if I expected to escape, for the men had already been admitted to the outer room. I could hear them talking loudly, but could not hear the duenna. Poor old woman, I fancied she must have been frightened out of her wits, or fainted outright.

Without a moment's hesitancy I threw myself over the rail of the balcony. For an instant I hung, holding on by my hands. One view I had of a white robed figure, standing at the window, silent, her hands clasped as if in prayer. My angel, she was all I saw, and then I let go my hold.

CHAPTER VIII.—AN INTRACTABLE PRISONER.

THE distance to the pavement was greater than I had supposed, but the force of my fall was unexpectedly broken. There was a sudden exclamation of surprise—a half suppressed cry, and I rolled over on the ground, grappling with a man who had been unlucky enough to be standing under the balcony.

What he should be doing there I did not take time to consider. Naturally my first thought was that it was an attempt to prevent my escape. But the man, whoever he was, could not have seen me, or he would not have let me drop on his head, but would have got out of the way.

He fell heavily, and lay as one stunned. Before he could recover himself I had my hand at his throat, and might have choked the life out of him had I not discovered by his long gown that he was a monk. I released my hold, and he rose, crossing himself and muttering a prayer.

"Who are you?" I demanded. "And what are you doing here?"

I had begun to suspect that he was there for no good purpose.

"I need not tell you who I am; you can see by my dress," he replied, still breathing heavily.

"You have no business here."

"It is the public street," he answered curtly. "How was I to know that you were to drop upon me? Men who visit houses for any honorable purpose do not let themselves out of second story windows, or drop from balconies," he added, his voice marked by a sarcastic twang.

"What is it to you if I choose to leave a house by a window rather than by the door?" I demanded.

"You fell upon me. You nearly killed me. Curses on you for your carelessness! And curses on you for your impudence!"

"You sneaking dog, move off, or I will kill you. I have no patience with such as you. Be off with you, or I'll not answer for what I'll do!" I cried, having hard work to restrain myself from laying hands on him.

"You will find that a poor priest has his friends."

"A dead priest has fewer friends," I said, moving toward him, and provoked beyond endurance, for he was blocking the way and evidently trying to detain me.

I would not have put my threat into execution, though recalling what Martin had told me the day before I felt that he would make trouble for me in the end. But he moved away, evidently deeming it best to take no chances with my temper—shuffling off, going a little lame, as I observed.

I could hear no noise within the house. The window above had been closed, and what had occurred there I had no way of finding out. But fearing that my visit and escape had been discovered, I hurried along the street and made off in a different direction from that taken by the monk. I had not gone

two hundred yards, however, when looking around I saw twenty or thirty horsemen ride away from the house.

I could hear the hoofs of the horses as they struck the pavement, the clanking of bits, the rattling of sabers as they drew up in order, and then the whole party dashed along the street, passing me unnoticed as I stood watching them from the angle of a building. It was probable that they had other business on hand that night of more importance than hunting down a house-breaker, such as they might have considered me to be.

I afterwards learned that excitement had been created by reports that the Liberals had gained another victory in the interior, and that General Dogolado was already marching upon the capital; this proving true, an uprising was to take place in the city, to act in conjunction with the forces outside. The rumors were afterwards found to be without foundation; but at the time they caused some uneasiness among those in authority, and led to the taking of precautionary measures to defeat any attack which might be made, and prevent the assembling of Constitutionalist in the city.

The presence of a considerable number of armed troops, stationed in different parts of the town, had served so far to check any unusual demonstrations. The city was practically under martial law. I saw several companies of soldiers under arms that night, and squads of cavalry rode recklessly by me.

There were few people on the street; yet, thinking best to avoid as much as possible the more populous districts, I made the circuit of the Plaza, going as far as the Mercado de la Merced, and then turning north.

I had not been in the city long enough to be well acquainted with its thoroughfares, and becoming somewhat confused in the darkness soon found that I was unable to locate the street I was on. I knew that I was in the northeast part of the city, and that was about all. The streets were quiet and few people were to be seen.

I was endeavoring to find some landmark which was familiar to me, from which I could get my bearings, when I became aware that I was being followed. Two men had kept behind me for some time, though at a distance.

The streets were dark, there being lights only here and there at long intervals, and I could only occasionally see the men when I looked back; but their footsteps came nearer and nearer as I went on. The meanest and lowest part of the city was just before me; and here, unless I could escape them, they would overtake me.

Thinking to elude them, I turned into a by street. As I did so a man came out of the house on the corner, stepping quickly along in the same direction I had been taking. Coming out of a lighted room, his eyes unaccustomed to the darkness, he did not see me; nor did he hear the men who had been following me and were not far behind him. He went on in a hurry.

Thinking that perhaps my safest course would be to let my pursuers pass me if possible, I waited in the deep shadow of the building, instead of going on down the alley. Here, unseen myself, I could observe any one who passed.

Evidently my pursuers were in some doubt as to which way I had gone, for they stopped only a few feet away from me.

"*Madre de Dios!*" exclaimed one of them, "he has escaped us."

"No, there he is!" said his companion.

I held my breath, but he had pointed down the street, and in a moment more they had hurried on.

That they had been following me was settled beyond a doubt. After they had passed I ventured to follow them, partly from curiosity, and partly because it might help me to find out where I was.

I kept a little distance from them, but far enough so that they would not hear me. They were led a lively chase, for the man was walking fast. Suddenly they turned into a dark street ahead and I lost sight of them.

As I stopped to listen, afraid lest I might unexpectedly come upon them, I was startled by muffled cries and the sound of a scuffle not a hundred yards ahead of me.

On the impulse of the moment I darted forward to give what assistance I could to the unfortunate man who had thus unconsciously substituted himself for me. He was making a plucky fight, but it was two against one. A blanket had been thrown over his head to stifle his cries, and he was struggling to rid himself of it. Evidently, in the darkness they had not discovered that they had the wrong man. They did not, either, hear me as I came up, so that my onset took them quite by surprise.

I hurled the nearest ruffian upon the stones, and gave the other such a stinging blow with my fist as caused him to relax his hold and stagger back dazed. Before I could get at the first fellow again he had regained his feet and was running down the street at the top of his speed. I managed to secure his companion, pinning his arms behind his back. The man who had been set upon had succeeded in freeing himself from the blanket and now came to my assistance.

"Can you hold the fellow?" he asked.

"I have him all right," I replied, tightening my hold, for the fellow was making a desperate attempt to break away.

"There were two of them, were there not?" he asked, looking about him in a somewhat bewildered way.

"Yes, but one of them took to his heels. 'Tis not likely that he will trouble us."

"It is a pity he escaped, for I'd have him where he'd not attempt this business again. These fellows are almost too bold."

"We are at least saved all trouble about him; and since we are neither robbed nor injured, we can afford to let him go. And as for this fellow we have here—why not let him go, too? He will be indebted to us for his liberty."

"For his life," he replied.

I had suddenly discovered that the fellow was Fernandez; and it had occurred to me that if I interfered in his behalf, he might, in turn, do me some service in the future. Besides, I thought, if I let him go that would end the matter, and I was not likely to be troubled or brought into notoriety by the affair; but I found that the Mexican was not inclined to my views.

"It would be a bad example, señor," he said. "He should be made to serve a lesson to those of his class."

The fellow was shaking. Coward that he was, I had little sympathy for him, but I did not want his blood on my hands; and, besides, for the reasons I have mentioned, I was now anxious to get rid of him.

"We will take his parole," I suggested, "and his promise that he will not cross our path again."

"His parole, señor, would be worth nothing," said the Mexican, with a contemptuous kind of laugh. "Put an end to him, and thus remove the temptation for breaking his parole and thereby damning his soul."

He had drawn a knife, and I believe he would have made short work of carrying out his threat, had I not released my hold, with an intimation whispered in the fellow's ear for him to run. He did run, and no coward ever showed a livelier pair of legs.

"I half believe you meant to let him go," said my companion, turning upon me angrily.

"Well, he is gone," I replied, as if to dismiss the subject.

"Yes, he is gone," repeated the Mexican, "and it was for me, not you, to deal with him."

"Well, I have nothing on my conscience to trouble me. And but for me they might have got the best of you."

"To be sure," he replied. "At least I am indebted to you. It would have been a fine stroke of business if they had kidnapped Francisco Miranda. That was their object, probably, rather than robbery," he said, as he kicked the blanket which lay at his feet.

I had not known before who this man was. In fact I knew very little of him at the time, though his name was familiar to every one and he had caused the Constitutional party no end of trouble. I thought it best to allow him to remain deceived as to the fact that the fellows had been following me. Explanations would have been rather embarrassing, even if I was believed.

"We might as well be going," he suggested.

As we walked along together I noticed that he was a man past middle age, and of rather a fine figure. He talked freely and without reserve.

"How does it come that you, an American, are in the city at this time?" he asked, and I could almost feel his sharp, questioning eyes.

"I am staying here for a short time—until I can find it convenient to leave," I replied.

"A traveler."

"Yes, seeing a little of the country."

"A bad time to visit Mexico," he continued. "When affairs become adjusted strangers will be made more welcome."

I could see that he had a prejudice against Americans. Coming to the next corner I inquired where we were.

"On the corner beyond is Sto. Domingo," he replied, pointing with his finger.

I had failed to recognize the building until he pointed it out to me, but I needed no other information now to find my way to my lodgings.

"Will you not give me your name?" he asked, as I was about to leave him.

"Harvey," I replied.

"Señor Harvey, I am indebted to you for possibly saving my life. I shall remember you. Men do not interfere as you did tonight for the love of the business. You might have received a knife thrust. I thank you again. I shall be pleased to see you any time you may find it in your way to call upon me. But I am here and there. I do not remain in one place long."

With the advice for me to look out for myself he left me.

Reaching my lodgings, I sought my own room. I had received some wounds, which, though insignificant, yet needed attention. That night I slept well, was up early the next morning, but had not finished dressing when there was a tramp of feet outside my door.

"Is this the room?" I heard some one ask.

"Yes, but I do not think he has yet risen," some one answered, and I knew the voice to be that of my landlord.

"We will wake him," said the first speaker.

There was a rattling of my door, accompanied by noise enough to wake a deaf man. I let them pound, sitting on my bed meanwhile trying to determine what it was all about. I confess that I had some fears that it meant trouble for me.

"What is wanted?" I finally demanded, when there was a lull in the pounding.

"Open the door and you will soon find out," was the gruff reply.

"I will not open the door until you first tell me what is wanted," I retorted.

"I demand that you open the door," came the same authoritative voice.

"Not until you inform me of your business."

"*Madre de Dios!*" he exclaimed, "I will break down the door then—I will force it. I have an order for your arrest." And again there was an onslaught on the panels.

"And I choose not to be arrested," I cried, as soon as I could make myself heard. "I will shoot the first man who attempts to execute the order."

I had drawn my revolvers, and as if to emphasize my threat I fired, and the bullet crashed through the upper part of the door. There was a precipitous retreat of the enemy and negotiations were carried on after that with less active demonstrations from those on the outside.

With a grim determination to resist if force was attempted, I refused to admit them; and they, doubtless believing that they had either a desperado or a madman to deal with, dared not break down the door. The controversy finally ended by their stationing a guard there, thus making me a prisoner in my own room.

I smiled to myself and was somewhat elated over my victory when I found what they had done. They had certainly proceeded about their task in a clumsy way. Had they, in the first place, waited until I came out, it would have been a very easy matter for them to have arrested me, for I would have had no opportunity for effective resistance. As it was, seeing that I had stood them off thus far, I determined to hold out against them as long as possible.

At least I would try to learn their authority for attempting my arrest, and

what they were going to do with me. I did not relish the idea of a Mexican prison, or Mexican justice. Both were bad enough at best, and I had no favors to expect.

I finished dressing, then sat down on my bed to try to think of some way to secure my release or devise a plan of escape.

I knew that I could expect no assistance from the American consul. He was not in a position at that time to enforce his demands, and his requests were likely to go unheeded. Besides, my conduct would not bear investigation. My own acts would place me in a bad light. My escape must be effected by my own shrewdness.

The more I thought over my situation, the more I was convinced that it was a very serious one. My chances for escape were very small. I could not let myself out of the window without falling into the hands of the soldiers. I had discovered that there was a company of them stationed at the house. There was a chance for escape if I threw open my door, and with drawn revolvers, after the manner of desperadoes, made a dash for liberty. But even then, if I succeeded in gaining my freedom I would be a fugitive and could not expect to escape the police.

I could but blame myself for the brawl at the *pulqueria*. The affair would become known all over the city; and the description obtained of me would make it impossible for me to venture on the street without being recognized. This was likely to embarrass me seriously, if not defeat my plans to rescue Señorita Teresa.

I determined to await developments, which was about all I could do. The situation appeared ludicrous to me, despite its seriousness. I was sitting on my bed with drawn revolvers guarding the door on the inside, while a couple of sentinels were standing without, to see that I remained a prisoner.

I had discovered, on attempting to talk with the guard, that the men would hold no conversation with me. Even had they been willing to talk it was probable that I could have learned nothing from them as to the cause of my arrest. But I was not to be kept long in suspense. An hour or two later I heard some one come along the walk, speak to the guard, and then knock at my door.

"Who comes?" I demanded.

"One who has something of importance to say to you," was the reply.

"That may be," I answered, "but I am not receiving callers this morning."

"One comes who has authority to negotiate with you," I was informed. "One who may be able to secure your release."

"How am I to know what your authority is?" I asked. "Will you please state who you are?"

"If señor chooses to admit me, that will be made known to him. Señor can do as he pleases."

I thought it best to admit the man, whoever he might be; so shoved the bolt of the door, stepped back, and told him to come in. The door was pushed slowly open, and a monk stalked into the room and stood motionless before me.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

AN UNSETTLED ACCOUNT.

BY MARTIN ORDE.

The satisfaction Daunt Ramsey demanded after his mother's death and the strange compact by which it was to be granted—A substitute for a duel and the ensuing attitude of the challenger.

MRS. MORDAUNT RAMSEY was dead. She had been a beauty and a belle, yet of all those who had loved or imitated her, there were only three left to stand over her coffin with an actual sense of loss.

To the rest of the world her death stood only for a tragedy completed. In many ways it had even been something of a relief to society, as if, as some one cynically put it, "for once in her life she had done the right thing."

In truth, society had grown very tired of Mrs. Ramsey and her tragedy.

She had been a beautiful girl when she married Mordaunt Ramsey, and she grew into a still more beautiful woman. All went smoothly with her life, and if rumor credited her with breaking more hearts than was absolutely justifiable, the fact did not score one line on her delicate face.

Her two children were very handsome, and she was devoted to them—even worried, perhaps, over Alice's delicate health and Daunt's unsteadiness. To her husband she had always shown tact and a discriminating affection which served to cover the real lack of sympathy between them, and she had not been unhappy.

That was ten years ago. She thought it all over, as she lay that last day, drifting helplessly down the river toward the unknown—if she had only died then! There had been so many people to be sorry then, and now there were so few!

It was a very conventional story, and hardly needs telling. Of course Chris Courtney was to blame with his vague, handsome face and boyish eagerness of manner. There had been the usual scandal, only worse in this case than usual.

Then Mordaunt Ramsey died very suddenly, and everybody waited for the engagement to be announced, and it never was.

Poor Mrs. Ramsey. The feet of the Nemesis that overtakes foolish women were on her track pitifully soon. Her daughter Alice, the frail girl with the big blue eyes, had grown frailer and whiter and more miserable eyed than ever during the past two years, and one day she went quietly out of this world into another, peopled only by the fantasies of her darkened mind.

Nervous prostration, followed by settled melancholia, the doctors said; but society shook its head and raised its eyebrows. Mrs. Ramsey put Alice into an asylum, and went on taking her afternoon walks with Chris Courtney, with the mockery of golden hair on her forehead and the mockery of paint on her cheeks.

She was fifty, but she looked thirty still. Nothing seemed to make any difference to her placid, lovely face—not even that her son Daunt was being less and less seen at people's houses, and was drinking more and more heavily.

The last two years of her life were spent in the bitter anguish of seeing the eyes which had adored her grow cold and careless; in faint passionate efforts to win them back, and in hearing people say that it served her right, to fall in love with a man ten years her junior. Death was a great deal easier than this, and she realized it, even at the last.

Her cousin, who had been more than a sister to her in the early days of her spoiled girlhood, who had stood her friend through all her troubles, was the person to fill the dead hands with flowers and smooth the locks away from the quiet face.

Daunt Ramsey did not come to see his mother, and they dared not send for him, lest it should be to drag him from some low barroom into her room. He disappeared, as was his wont, and was not seen until the morning of the funeral, when no one asked for him, or spoke to him about his grief.

He sat still, the handsome, haggard boy, with a certain brooding fierceness in his look, and let his cousin do everything.

So it happened that she was the one to take Chris Courtney into the darkened room, and open the shutter to let him look his last upon the woman he had loved.

In his heart Chris was conscious of a terrible pain. She loved him so—he had been so much to blame. He was glad—oh, too glad for utterance—that he had not said to her the words which had been on his lips for the past six months!

It was the first time that his habit of procrastination had ever given him cause for rejoicing, and he could not help feeling, dimly, that this very habit was partly the cause why Mrs. Ramsey lay so still and did not move her hands over the lilies and violets.

"She looks so natural, as if she were asleep," said her friend at his side, finding a poor comfort in the reflection.

Chris did not answer. He could not have agreed with her. To him, the face in the coffin—shorn of its yellow hair, its delicate bloom, and bare of that marvelous welcoming smile which had hidden so much from his eyes—was anything but natural.

She looked so old, her face had so many lines on it, her mouth was so weary, the thin hair so gray on her forehead. He realized thinking how the woman's life toward him had been a long effort of deception for love's sake; an elaborate part, which she must so often have wearied of playing!

Not till he saw her stripped of all such necessity, a middle aged woman, and very weary, did he understand what it must have cost her—the unfailing readiness and interest, the unstrained laughter, the sparkle of her conversation. Was that in the coffin the real woman, and not the golden haired, brown eyed, Dresden china beauty that he had known?

It was a revelation that brought a lump to his throat, and a great tenderness into his heart, and for the moment his failing love waxed ardent and strong.

"Come back! come back!" were the words on his lips. "I understand! I see!" But he dared not speak them before the majesty of her dead face.

As he passed out of the room, he almost touched the figure of Daunt Ramsey, huddled in a chair. Daunt looked up at him with a sudden passionate indignation in his face, and Chris quailed.

He wanted to say something, but there were no words, and so he only went out hurriedly and tried, by thinking of other things, to forget that huddled figure with its haggard face, and fierce, bloodshot eyes.

It haunted him all that day and up to a late hour in the night. He was not a man who in general allowed his imagination to run away with him, but in his present softened state, indifference was not there; things pierced and stung him which until now had fallen blunted against that armor.

He sat in a chair by his library fire, in the studied quiet of a bachelor establishment, and thought it all out again and again—the attraction, the passion, the steady waning friendship, the death at the end.

He had always shut all other considerations out of his mind when he thought of her, but now with the picture of her beauty and her brown eyes came one of a huddled, wretched figure, came one, too, of a slender girl, with a strained look around her mouth. Those two! he had not thought much about them. The clock ticked their history—

"Daunt—drunk—Alice—mad," until it seemed as if he must shriek back some answer to silence its voice.

The sound of his front door closing after a late visitor roused him somewhat. His mind had been on Daunt Ramsey so continuously that he was hardly surprised to see him appear on the threshold.

The manner of his appearance, however, gave him a certain sense of astonishment. Daunt, in evening dress, neat, with his tall hat in his hand, was a very different figure from the miserable looking young man of the morning.

His manner was quiet, steady, decided, without agitation of any kind.

"I am very glad to see you," Chris made haste to say, rising to greet his visitor.

"I have come to settle our account," said Daunt composedly, taking off his gloves and advancing to the fire.

"Our account?"

"The unpaid account between you and me. I am not keeping you—you have no engagement?" His voice was courteous and formal. Chris thought he understood, and rose.

"Yes, but you'll go home first, old boy," he said, taking Daunt by the sleeve; "we'll see about this tomorrow—you're not fit."

The eyes of the young man had a steadiness of gaze which made him drop the sleeve and return to his chair.

"I am perfectly sober at this moment," said Daunt quietly; "I have not taken a drink for two days on this account. When you make sure that I am perfectly sober, I will proceed."

The steadiness of his hand and the decision of his movements testified to the truth of his words. Chris saw it, and broke the silence rashly by a plea, an entreaty, for he dreaded what was to come.

"Daunt," he said, trying hard to keep his voice as cold and even as that of the younger man, "I have an idea of what you have come for, and I say for your own sake, don't—don't go back to the past. It can do no good! Don't quarrel with me, don't rake up old scores; for pity's sake, not now!"

"I have no intention of quarreling," Daunt answered, seating himself on the other side of the fire. "I have a few words to say, if you will be so good as to listen."

Chris bowed his head.

"What happened today," Daunt continued, with that almost wooden immovability of voice and manner, "has at last made it possible for us to go into this matter. During her life many reasons, which I need not enter into, made it quite impossible."

Chris assented—he began to wonder what was coming next. There was an element of unusualness in this preliminary.

"I have heard from your tradespeople and friends," went on Daunt, "that you settle your bills promptly when you recognize the justice of the claim. My account happens to be for a considerable amount, and is at present unpaid. It remains for you to allow its justice, which is why I am here."

"If you want to fight me," Chris cried angrily, "say so at once, without all this metaphor!"

"If you fail to see the justice of my claim," replied Daunt, moved not a whit by the other's excitement, "I will shoot you when and where you please. If not, it will not be necessary."

He took from his breast pocket a folded paper and spread it on the table beside him. Chris watched him curiously, with a deep foreboding at his heart.

"I must beg you to hear me with patience," said Daunt, raising his cold eyes to the other's face. "I have made a note of the items. I will be as brief as possible."

"Before you go on," said Chris, leaning forward and speaking with desperate earnestness, "hear me a moment. Your mother loved me. I don't defend myself, but have some pity on me! See, I am pleading before you as if you were my judge, and you will not understand! Speak of it if you must, but not in this way. Give me a chance. Don't throw it all on my shoulders. Don't you see there are things no man can decide—not you, nor I, nor any one? Remember, she loved me!"

He stopped, exhausted. He had spoken as much to drown the ticking of the clock as to stop Daunt.

"Alice—mad!—Daunt—drunk!"

He covered his ears to shut it out.

What had made him so weak, so humble? Chris could not have told. The first shade of feeling he had shown quivered on Daunt's face now and seemed to stifle him.

He leaned back a moment, very white, and Chris, in his own agony, was sorry for the boy's suffering. There was a decanter of wine on the table. He drew it toward him, filled a glass, and pushed it across to Daunt.

Daunt struck the glass from the table and dashed it to pieces on the floor.

"You are worse than even I thought of you!" he cried, swayed with sud-

den violence. "Even I had not thought you would try to tempt me from my duty!"

"You are wrong," said Chris, sadly and very quietly. "I did not mean that. Go on." He leaned back in his chair and covered his eyes with his hand.

Daunt drew his paper toward him.

"Christopher Courtney, Dr., to Mordaunt Ramsey, Jr.," he read out. "Items as follows:

"From 1886 to 1893, inclusive, the wanton tarnishing of an honorable name.

"During the same period the loss of a mother's love, sympathy, and respect.

"The health of mind and happiness of an only and beloved sister.

"Received payment——"

He looked across at Chris, who sat clenching his hands on the arms of his chair.

"It is unsigned," he said. There was a silence in the room which vibrated like a sound.

"They tell me that you were a good son," Daunt proceeded, after a long pause, "and that when your mother died, it was in your arms, and thanking God for you. If so, you must know what such a love is worth; you must see what you have deprived me of.

"She loved me so dearly when I was a little chap! She held me in her arms, and told me stories, and called me her little son, her precious treasure. I was to be her protector, to love and tend her when I grew to be a man. You may not believe me when I tell you that this was my highest ambition, my best dream for the future.

"When I was a boy I had no friend stancher than my mother. She understood everything. I would have died rather than have grieved her. Did I ever touch a drop until my father died and I found out why people pitied me? Answer me that!"

Chris did not speak nor move. Between his eyes and at the corners of his mouth tortured lines were stamping themselves, and beads of sweat stood on his forehead.

Daunt's voice had lost its cold steadiness; it ran the gamut of agony and despair.

"Was there much left for me to do, then, when I found she did not care whether I came or went; when I came home, time after time, from the office, and found you there, and she did not speak to me? When you were her only thought, night and day, she took her walks with you, and spent her evenings with you, and it didn't matter to her how and where I spent mine? When I found the whole world ringing with it, and my mother—*my mother!*—made a butt and a byword?"

Chris put out his hand involuntarily, but Daunt was pitiless. His whole body was shaking and his eyes blazed.

"There was Alice, too. Mother never cared much for Alice; she was always weakly and dull and not quick at seeing things; but she was very fond

of me; we loved each other. What could I do when she ran to me, and clung to me, and shuddered, saying over and over: 'Oh, I wish she wouldn't! I wish she wouldn't!' because you were sitting in the library?"

A hoarse, strangled cry broke from Chris and he stood up. He had borne all a man could bear in silence—the universe staggered under his feet.

"Ramsey!" he cried, holding the edge of the table with both hands and facing the other's stern, rigid face, "for Heaven's sake, stop! Do what you will, suggest what you please. I give up everything—only stop! Don't you see you're killing me?"

"And you propose to do——?" Daunt's voice never wavered.

"What you please. You have constituted yourself my judge—make my atonement. Only, for pity's sake, don't speak again of that poor child!"

He felt another word would drive him mad. The clock, the rattle in the street outside, the crackle of the fire, the furious pace of his own heart—all beat to the time of those horrible words:

"Daunt—drunk—Alice—mad!"

The two men faced each other.

"There is only one reparation possible," said Daunt solemnly. The two pairs of eyes, one stern and steady, one hunted and desperate, met and understood each other.

"Ah!" said Chris, very quietly. He sat down again, there was another pause.

"In any case, it is one life for three," said Daunt, unswervingly pursuing his object. "I do not see that your life is of use to any one. Perhaps it was to your mother, but she is dead. Perhaps it was to my mother, but she, too, is dead. Since your mother died you have been quite alone, and there is nobody to care if you should go. Had she lived I should not have come to you in this way."

"If I had any self respect," replied Chris, with a steadiness now equal to the other's, "I should call you a coward and challenge you. But the little I had was buried in that coffin today. And if I killed you, it would only be adding to my wretchedness."

"You are welcome to try!" Daunt said eagerly.

Chris shook his head. "No," he said, "I won't try. There's no use in duels; two are hurt when one will do—and often nothing is gained. I said you were my judge, and your account against me is heavier than I can bear. I will pay it; for Alice and for you. You shall have your life, and you shall sign me a receipt for that account."

"You will do it?" cried Daunt, moved despite himself.

"Here, tonight! I have always paid my debts, I shall pay this one, too. And it is not an overcharge."

He spoke more to himself than to the young man, who watched him silently. Back in his mind Daunt was conscious of feeling pity, and something very like admiration. But the humor, or rather the fantasy, of the situation never seemed to enter his mind nor that of Chris.

It was not strange to either, that one should come to the other, deliberately proposing that he should commit suicide, and that the other should

consent. That aspect of the affair had been blotted out in their intense and complex emotions, and never occurred to them at all.

To stifle his thoughts, Daunt drew the paper toward him, took a fountain pen from his pocket, and scrawled a big unsteady "Mordaunt Ramsey, Jr." over the page. Then he pushed it over to Chris, who folded it and cast it on the coals. A light flame flickered up and died away, and then Daunt spoke.

"I will go then," he said, rising, "since what I came for is done. I am glad you saw my point of view."

He moved toward the door. Chris followed and laid his hand on the knob. Then Chris put out his hand.

"I have injured you," he said hoarsely; "how much I never realized, but I am going to pay up. Tomorrow, when I am dead, you will remember? And won't you shake hands?"

"I cannot," said Daunt, in his immovable voice. "Good by!"

He opened the door and went out, closing it behind him.

Alone, Chris regained his nerve and went on very calmly with his preparations. His resolution was taken and his mind made up.

The torture of his late awakened remorse, falling on the new wound of his grief, was more than he could live under. He had prided himself on being an unemotional man, cynical and passionless; now a new set of thoughts, vigorous, poignant, unbearable, ruled his mind.

An active despair laid hold of him, a despair that was like physical agony, a mental neuralgia, and he longed for death so as to be rid of it.

After writing a letter, he unlocked an inner drawer of his desk and took his revolver from it. He examined the cartridges carefully and polished the barrel with his handkerchief.

As he did so, a new thought struck him. When he was found dead the next morning what might not happen to Daunt, who had been the last to leave the house, who had such well known reasons for hating him?

He got pen and ink, and after some thought wrote this sentence in his firm handwriting: "I hereby state that I have taken my own life," and signed it. He put the piece of paper in a conspicuous place, then taking up the pistol, looked long around the room.

It was very cheerful and comfortable. His eyes lingered over the many objects—photographs, hers among them, books, the dull, red fire, the laden mantelpiece. Gradually, as he looked, he whitened to the lips.

"It's harder than I thought," he murmured, "to leave all this, to go——" he pulled himself together. "I won't do it here," he said aloud defiantly. "They shan't find me on that hearth rug—no—in my bedroom, it's dark and quiet there."

The door of his room was especially fitted, heavy and air tight. He opened it, and taking his revolver stepped out into the hall.

* * * * *

When Daunt Ramsey heard that heavy library door shut after him his mind was in such a tangle of excited thoughts that he half staggered down the staircase. There was such a tense strain in his brain that he hardly knew where he was going.

The air of the house seemed unusually close and hot, and there was a pungent smell. He coughed once or twice as he opened the front door, and welcomed the keen night air as a relief, from what he scarcely knew.

Once in the street, he walked briskly away from the house. It was all over! He pulled out his watch, and, holding it up to the street lamp, saw that it was after two o'clock, too late for him to go to the club, as he should like to do.

His abstinence of the past forty eight hours was beginning to tell upon him, and he felt nervous and restless.

It was all over, he thought jubilantly, walking fast. Chris Courtney was going to pay up; the world wouldn't be burdened with him much longer; there was to be vengeance for Alice in the asylum, and for that dead woman to whom he was so dear.

He had waited long for it, but it was his now! The morning papers would tell how they found him, dead on the rug in front of his library fire. Oh, it was just, it was right that such a man should go!

The cold air seemed to act like a damper on his hot, vengeful thoughts.

Try as he would, it was not possible to keep from a feeling of pity for the man he had left, and this feeling was making Daunt painfully unhappy.

"Poor beggar!" he thought, walking faster, "he might have had time to repent. It was very quick, horribly quick!"

A neighboring steeple struck the quarter. Daunt shivered. "I wonder if he has done it yet?" he questioned.

The idea conjured up a picture, and in an instant Daunt's mind was being pursued into corners by an unimaginable horror—the room he had left, as he had left it, with the dying fire; and on the hearth rug a twisted, distorted form, lying quite still, and with a smoking pistol in its hand.

An awful way to meet death! Death! the word touched his mind like a cold finger. He stopped, walked on more slowly, and then stopped again.

Had he fully realized what it meant, his reparation? And after all, was it his to require? He groaned aloud in his hesitation. He hated Chris, he told himself; hated him as a deadly enemy. Yet who was he to go to him, giving him no chance, try, judge, and condemn him, and then go away grimly, leaving the execution in the victim's own hands?

Ah, surely, even with Alice and his mother where they were, and his injury so fresh and bleeding, surely it was a dreadful thing to do! To send the man out of life, alone, with no pity, no help, no hope! To let them find him silent, dead in his own room, without a chance, a word!

The neighboring steeple clanged the half hour. Daunt turned and fled down the street like a madman. His possessing thought was to be in time.

Oh, if he had already done it! It must not be, it was not just nor right! Let his injuries be, they were done; let him fight Chris in broad daylight, but not this!

He began to find excuses for his enemy, and to accuse himself of haste and harshness. He had left him alone to die, and would not give him a hand in forgiveness!

Daunt was running with all his might now, and was near his goal. As he

came, his heart leaped into his throat with horror, for he saw a little knot of people at the door, and a man at the lamp post ringing an alarm—was it for——?

"Has he done it?" shrieked Daunt, charging down the group; "has he done it?"

"What, sir?" the policeman asked; "it's the house is afire."

Daunt looked up. Wreaths of smoke were curling through the transom of the vestibule which the heat had broken, and there was a faint crackling noise. The policeman was battering at the front door.

It gave with a crash and a splintering of wood, just as Daunt had stooped to dip his handkerchief in the gutter and lay it over his face. Then he dashed inside.

How thick the smoke was! It clutched him round the throat with a dead grip, and his eyes were filled with it. He clung to the baluster, and bent his head low to get a breath of air near the floor.

The fire, which had started in the cellar, had flamed thus far in the front of the house, so as Daunt mounted, it grew cooler; but the smoke, collected in the halls, was more dense. It was a pungent, asphyxiating smoke, due to the presence of certain chemicals which Courtney had been keeping in his cellar, and Daunt found his breath growing labored.

He forced his way to the library, crying Chris' name. The lamp was still dimly burning, and there was a draft of air by an open window. Daunt paused, gasping, and looked wildly around. There was no sign of Chris.

In the upper hall the smoke was unendurable; Daunt was beaten back. As he turned to flee for his life, his foot struck an inert body, and the next moment he bent over the unconscious Courtney, who still held the pistol in his hand.

Daunt wrenched away the pistol and flung it from him. Then he picked Chris up and staggered with him to the stair.

Oh, that long stair! Was ever stair so long? Courtney was an unusually tall man, heavily built, and Daunt was a slender boy at best, and weakened from dissipation; but he held him by the arms and dragged him painfully down.

The heat grew more intense; his breath came short. He gathered Chris up into his arms as well as he could, and shutting his eyes, pushed onward.

As he bent his head so as to get a good breath, something intensely bright flared into his eyes, and he felt a terrible pain in his right hand. He crept down a step or two farther, shielding Chris from the flame with his arm.

Then came a clanging of bells, and a roar of people's voices; cold air swept across his face and he plunged forward, knowing no more.

* * * * *

One morning two weeks later Chris Courtney opened his eyes, conscious that the pain and anguish of fever had left him. In his intense weakness he lay quite still and tried to reconstruct something out of the tangle of the past—the whirl of pain and delirium, and faces that flashed upon him through wreaths like smoke—two faces, the doctor's, and one other, at the sight of which he invariably shrieked and covered his eyes.

What had happened after he had opened his library door and staggered back, half stifled by the dense smoke. He remembered the numbing suffocation that crept over him, the fight to the door of his room, there to sink down overpowered, his last thought that Daunt might feel some pity if he knew.

The rest was all a part of his delirium. Of course it was a dream, a dream of heat and smoke, a strong arm dragging him downward, and Daunt's face above him, blackened with soot and set with pain.

There was a gentle humming sound in the room, and he turned his eyes wistfully from the unfamiliar wall paper to see what was the cause of it.

A cheery fire blazed on the hearth, and Daunt Ramsey sat near it reading.

"What is it?" asked Chris, weakly, struggling up in bed.

Daunt got up, spilled the cat off of his lap, and tossed away his book.

"Ah, you are better!" he said, advancing to the bedside. "I'm awfully glad, old man!"

Chris looked at him wonderingly. There was a glow of color in his cheek, which was like health to his once jaded drunkard's face.

Then Chris' fever cleared eyes wandered down to the bandaged hand that Daunt was trying to conceal behind him. He indicated it by a gesture, for his voice had left him.

"That? Oh, that's all right!" Daunt said, with elaborate indifference; "it doesn't hurt now."

"Why did you——?" the weak voice wavered to a whisper.

"Oh, to settle the account," said Daunt hastily, "that's all."

The room was very still. Then a sound throbbed in the silence, and another, and another, and another.

It was weakness, of course—Daunt understood that; and the doctor understood, too, for when he came to the door of the room five minutes later, he listened a moment, and then stole quietly away. There are some things which even doctors do not meddle with.

BONAPARTE.

He loved the fray as petrels love the sands,
 And wave worn rocks, and ocean's stormy waste;
 It was his own calm home, wherein he traced
 Vast empires he should found in puissant lands.
 Unblanched, while flashed a thousand levin brands,
 Would he survey the battle's fiery haste;
 And wheresoe'er with visage stern he faced,
 He pointed victory there with fateful hands.
 What though he walked an exile on the shore
 Of far Helena, a world conqueror he!
 In the tumultuous thunders of the sea,
 He fought new battles; and his kindling glance
 Saw allied nations crushed, enslaved, and o'er
 Them all the lifted sword of victor France.

Henry Jerome Stockard.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF SILENCE.*

BY FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY.

A story of Russia and the Nihilists—The mighty power wielded by an American in the dominions of the Czar and the forces that were combined for his overthrow—Withstanding an emperor to his face.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

DANIEL DERRINGTON, detective from New York, goes to Russia and enters the service of the Czar as one of the Brotherhood of Silence, an association founded by Peter the Great, but whose membership has dwindled until now it consists only of the Czar, Alexis Saberevski, who was the means of bringing Derrington to Russia, and Prince Michael Zabriski, an intimate of the Czar. While the prince and Derrington are chatting in an apartment of the palace, after an audience with the emperor, the New Yorker detects a spy in the person of a servant, Jean Moret, whom he hopes to find useful, and sends to prison in St. Petersburg.

The prince takes Derrington to call on a famous Russian beauty, the Princess Olga de Echeveria, to whom he is introduced under the name of Dubravnik. While in the conservatory he overhears her conversing with a man she calls Ivan, and the name of Jean Moret is mentioned. When the princess discovers that he has overheard, she requests that he will not speak of what he knows until the next day, and will come to see her at noon.

On his way home Derrington is shot at, but makes a marvelous escape, and the next day keeps his appointment with the princess. She shows him a note from the man Ivan, her brother, which reads:

Our interview in the garden was overheard by two persons. One of them fortunately was a friend; the other must not keep the engagement made with you.

She tells him that her brother was sentenced to Siberia when he was sixteen, but escaped and is thought to be dead. She adds that that note means that for Derrington there is no escape; the Nihilists will kill him when he leaves her house. In reply Derrington informs the princess that she must leave Russia.

He is about to take his departure when she bars the way, imploring him to take the oath of the Nihilists in order that she may so inform her friends and thus spare his life. On his refusal she asks him to sit down again while she relates the circumstances that have made her a Nihilist, and when he complies she begins by asking him to imagine that he is a young Russian of noble birth whose sister has been torn from her home by order of the Czar and sent to Siberia without just cause and under the most degrading conditions.

He (the brother) has sought her out, and finding her out of her mind from her misery has killed her with his own hand. Then, so altered in appearance by the horrors he had undergone that even his fiancée does not know him, he returns to Russia, intent on two things: to kill both the Czar and the man who had placed in his sister's room the articles which had been the cause of her undoing. This man, however, is away and the brother obtains an interview with the Czar, charges him with his crime under cover of his pistol, and then, with the weapon almost in the imperial face, pulls the trigger.

CHAPTER X.—LOVE, HONOR, AND OBEY.

THE princess paused and lowered her head until it almost touched me.

I waited, wondering how it could be that the Czar still lived, for with death so near, within a few inches of his face, what could have saved him!

"Hush!" she whispered. "The end is not yet—not quite yet. You

This story began in the October issue of THE ARGOSY. The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.

pulled the trigger, but the charge in the pistol did not explode. That is what you thought when you leaped back and raised the hammer for another trial. But it was even worse than that, for there was no charge to explode; the pistol was not loaded. Your poor mind, so overburdened, had forgotten the most necessary thing of all, and you had not prepared your weapon for the work it had to do.

"You discovered your error too late; but the Czar had discovered it also.

"He was bigger and stronger than you, and with a bound he was upon you. He seized the pistol and tore it from your grasp, and then, while he held you, bending backwards—for you were still weak, and he always was a giant—he brought it down again, and again, and again upon your unprotected head, until your brains were battered out, and spattered themselves upon the floor, the walls, and even upon the ceiling of the room.

"And then, when you were quite dead, killed by the hand of the Czar himself, he, covered for once in his life with real blood, blood that he had shed in person and not by deputy, staggered to the door, called for assistance, and fainted."

Again she left me, this time crossing the room and throwing herself upon a couch, where she cried softly, like one who has an incurable sorrow, which must at times break out in tears. After all, tears are the safety valves of nervous expansion, and there are times when they save the heart and the brain from bursting.

I knew that, and I left her alone to "cry it out," at least for the moment; but I knew that she had not yet told me quite all; that there must be a sequel to all this, and I was soon to hear it.

Presently the sobbing of the princess ceased, and after watching her for a time, I left my seat and went to her.

"Princess," I said in a low tone.

She raised her head from the pillow and looked at me, and I have never seen such a combination of emotions expressed in one glance as there was in her eyes at that instant.

"There is more?" I asked.

"Very little more. I have not yet told you why I am a Nihilist, and that is what I began this story for. Yvonne was my most intimate friend. I loved her as I would have loved—no, better than I would have loved a sister. Her brother, Stanislaus, was my betrothed. We were to have been married within the year when Yvonne was taken away. Now you know all;" and she turned her head away again.

"No; not all yet," I said. "What became of the officer who made all the trouble?"

"He returned," she replied, without again raising her eyes.

"Where is he now, princess?"

"He is here."

"Here? In St. Petersburg?"

"Yes."

"Do you know him? Do you see him?"

"Yes, frequently. He was here last night."

"Will you tell me his name?"

"No."

"Shall I tell it to you?"

"Shall you tell it to me! Do you mean to say that you know it?"

"I can guess it."

"Well?"

"He is a Nihilist. He has just returned to the city. All these years he has been absent, and had Stanislaus waited for his coming he would have been alive now. The man you mean is Captain Alexis Durnief."

She started bolt upright.

"You knew it? You knew it?" she cried. "Tell me how you knew it?"

"I guessed it only just now. I guessed it from the expression of your eyes when you greeted him last night, that is, coupling the expression with the recital of today, and with one or two hints of his character that I gleaned from him. He is the man?"

"Yes. He—is—the—man!!!"

"And you receive him here?"

"I cannot help it. My hands are tied."

"How are they tied?"

"You have already said."

"Yes? How?"

"He is a Nihilist. He does not know that I am aware of all that he did in the matter. He has been told that I do not know all! And"—here she leaped to her feet and confronted me like an enraged queen—"he has the effrontery to pretend that he is in love with me, and to believe that I can love him. Pah!"

"And you?" I asked.

"I?"

She crossed the room, turned and retraced her steps, reseating herself upon the couch. She was smiling now. Her composure had returned, though she was still pale, and there were deep rings under her eyes, which told of the suffering she had undergone.

"I think I will marry him," said she calmly.

"Indeed?" I remarked, raising my brows, but otherwise not showing the surprise I felt.

"Yes; I think I will marry him. Why not? It is the only way in which I can get the revenge I must have. I can get it in that way. He has hidden himself from anything that I can do, under the cloak of our order. I can marry him, and in six months I can torture him to death; or, if that fails, I can poison him. Ah! did you ever hate—truly hate—anybody, Mr. Dubravnik? If you never did, you cannot imagine the feeling in my heart for those two men—no, not men, beasts, reptiles, Alexis Durnief and Alexander, the Czar."

"Do you think, princess," I said slowly, "that if Stanislaus were alive, he would approve of such a method of taking revenge for the wrongs done to him and to his sister?"

She did not reply, and presently I added:

"Do you think he would rest contented in his grave if you became the wife of the man who wronged him most, no matter what the purpose might be?"

"No," she said, "I do not."

"Did you love Stanislaus?"

She sighed deeply.

"How you probe the innermost secrets of one's heart, Dubravnik," she said. "I will tell you the truth. It is because I never did love him as I ought to have loved, because I never knew and appreciated his worth until I knew how faithful and loyal he could be, that is, until he was dead, that I cannot live and bear the thought that he shall go unavenged. I was a girl then, and I did not appreciate all the love that was lavished upon me. Afterwards I knew what I had lost."

"Then you will abandon this insane notion of marrying Durnief?"

"Yes. I never entertained it. It only occurred to me in that moment when we were speaking of him. I never even thought of it before. Oh, if you knew the bitterness of the heart of a woman who is used only for a tool, because she happens to possess beauty. But you cannot know; you cannot guess."

"True, I do not know, but I can guess. Remember, I heard what you said to your brother on this same subject in the garden."

"Ah!"

Like a flash of light through darkness, my own peril returned to her.

"You! What are you going to do?" she exclaimed.

"I am going about my daily duty just as though nothing had happened," I replied.

"Those men out there are waiting to kill you. Come! Let us see if they are there still."

We went to the window together and peered out. The britska was still waiting, and I felt that Olga shuddered as her hand rested for an instant upon my arm.

"Tell me your true name again," she demanded, rather irrelevantly, I thought, as we drew back. "You told me, but I have forgotten."

I mentioned it, and she repeated it over under her breath several times. Then, suddenly raising her face to mine, she said:

"Do you know of any way, no matter how, in which you can escape those men who are waiting for you?"

"Yes," I replied, "I know of one."

"What is it?"

"I can have them arrested where they are—every one of them; that is, if you will permit one of your servants to carry a message a short distance for me."

"They will stop him and read the message."

"They would permit him to go on again, for it would mean nothing to them."

"Then you are connected with the police."

"Princess, I have not deceived you in one single particular since I came into this house," I replied coldly.

"I believe you, Mr. Derrington; forgive me. You shall have the messenger."

"You forget one thing, princess."

"What?"

"Your own danger."

"In what way am I in danger?"

"If those men are arrested, they will know that you have betrayed them to me. Their friends will know it also."

"You mistake. I had not forgotten that. The Nihilists could not do me a greater mercy than to kill me. They would only save me the trouble of performing the act myself."

Then she raised her eyes and looked at me, and they were moist with unshed tears. There was that same indescribable pain in them that I had noticed several times since the interview began; that same expression which I could not fathom.

"I have found that there comes a time in a woman's life," she said slowly, "when all her pet theories fall flat and useless, when every idol that she has worshiped is demolished. Let us not talk of the danger to me. Let us instead prepare the message for my servant to carry."

"Before we discuss that farther—and we must return to it again—I want to remind you of one point that I think you have forgotten, concerning this proposed arrest."

"Well? What is it?"

"Your brother, Ivan."

"What of him?"

"Is it not more than probable that he is one of the men out there waiting for me?"

"Yes. It is. I had forgotten that."

"He would be caught in the net with the others. He would suffer the same fate that fell to them. Are you willing to run the risk of his being there?"

"No, oh, no!" she cried.

"You see, then, princess, how impossible it is for you to give me a messenger."

She wrung her hands together in agony. She walked the length of the room two or three times, and then she came and stood before me.

"I cannot let you be murdered in this way," she said brokenly. "I cannot sacrifice Ivan. I know by what you have already said that if you knew that Ivan was not there you would still refuse to accept the use of my messenger, knowing the danger that such an act would bring upon me—yes, even though I tell you that I shall take my own life before the dawn of another day, whether that danger exists or not. Cannot you see how I am suffering? Even though I try with all my strength to conceal it, can't you see it? Is there not some other way? Is there not something that can be done? Will you not help me? Great God! Can you not see why I suffer, my friend?"

"Olga," I replied, deliberately taking a step backwards and putting my hands behind me, fearing that I might clasp her in my arms in spite of my

resolution to remain calm and to continue to be master of the situation, "I think there is another way; I believe that something can be done; I will help you; I do see why you suffer, but I dare not confess it even to myself. If you will trust to me, and will obey me implicitly in all that I direct you to do, there is a way, and neither you nor your brother shall come to harm. Will you trust to me?"

"Yes, oh, yes," she cried unhesitatingly. "What am I to do?"

"Call the servant who is to take the message."

She turned to the door without another word, and disappeared through it. The moment she was gone, I took a fountain pen and a pad of paper from my pocket, and wrote rapidly—or seemed to write, for the pen left no trace upon the paper.

My invisible note was completed, and I was writing with another pen upon a second sheet of paper when the princess reentered the room. This time the writing was plainly visible, and while I asked her for an envelope I passed it to her to read.

It was addressed to my friend, Canfield, who had charge of the messenger service, and merely instructed him to forward the packages that had been left with him that morning to their several addresses without delay. It was signed, "Dubravnik."

"Is this the note my servant is to take?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes."

I folded the apparently blank sheet with the other and placed them both in the envelope, which I had already addressed.

"You see there is no harm in that note, even if the men outside should read it," I added when the servant had departed. "Your man, who is, of course, a spy, will read the note, which I purposely left unsealed, as soon as he is out of sight of the house. In an hour, every man who is waiting to take my life will be in prison. If your brother is among them, he will not be harmed and you——"

I hesitated, and she raised her eyes to mine and said:

"Well, and I?"

"You will have to do as you have agreed to do, obey me." I hesitated again, and then, with desperate courage, added:

"Love, honor, and obey me, Olga."

CHAPTER XI.—THE POWER OF THE BROTHERHOOD.

THE princess did not start—she did not even look surprised when I uttered the strange sentence that closed the last chapter, but her great round eyes welled up with tears, and she caught her breath once or twice. Then, without uttering a word, she extended her hand and placed it in mine, and we remained thus, for a moment, silent.

Presently, in a low whisper, I heard her repeat after me, the words, "Love, honor, and obey;" and she added: "As long as we both shall live."

With a quick gesture that was purely feminine, she withdrew her hand from mine and thrust the clustering hair away from her temples. Then she

went to the window and gazed out upon the snowclad city, and thus she remained for several minutes.

Presently she returned and came back to where I was standing.

"It is strange, is it not, Mr. Derrington?" she asked in a low voice. "I do not think that I am myself today. It is hard to realize that this is Olga d'Echeveria who speaks to you now. I am like another person; it is as though another spirit had entered my body, and I seem to act without a will of my own. It began last night when you first entered my presence. It was evident to me when I saw you apparently asleep in the garden, knowing that you had overheard the conversation between my brother and myself; it asserted itself when we stood together under the green light later in the evening, when you told me that I must keep the engagement made with you today, and when you entered this room a few hours ago, it seemed as though you belonged to me—as though you had stolen away my will—as though I had no right to act without your sanction. Can you explain it?"

"No," I replied, "nobody can explain it. It is a secret that is known only to God, and His ways are immutable. But we have each recognized it from the first."

We said nothing of love then. The subject seemed out of place at that moment. We both knew all that the other would have said, or could with truth say, and there was no need to do what would seem like repeating it.

"When will you hear from the note that you have sent?" she asked presently.

"Very soon, now," I replied. "If your servant has delivered the note, there should be a reply within a few moments. Let us go to the window and watch."

So we stood there by the window, silently communing with each other without speaking. Her left hand was clasped within my right one, and the minutes came and went until I raised my other hand and pointed silently towards a large, double britska that was coming up the street. I had recognized the huge proportions of Tom Coyle, where he sat, holding the reins, and I knew that underneath the covering were trusty followers of mine, who would make short work of the waiting assassins.

"There comes the answer to my note," I said. "Watch that britska."

"I see it," she replied.

It dashed up on a run straight for the point where the other one was still waiting, and came to a stop with a suddenness that threw the horses back upon their haunches.

At the same instant there dashed from beneath the covering a half dozen men, and while some seized the horses of the waiting britska, and others seized the man upon the driver's seat, still others pulled aside the curtains and sprang inside.

From our post of observation we could see that a severe struggle was taking place, and twice we heard the report of pistols; and then the smaller carriage drove away, while the larger one, that which Tom Coyle had been driving, dashed straight for the door of the princess' house.

"The other contained the prisoners," I said to my companion. "This

one is coming here. Remember now, Olga, that you promised to trust me implicitly. No matter what happens, Olga, remember that."

"I will remember," she replied.

Then there came the summons at the door, and the voice of Tom Coyle, requesting an audience with the Princess Olga d'Echeveria.

She looked at me inquiringly, and I nodded, and in a moment more, Tom, followed by two men, entered the room where we were awaiting them.

"Your name is Dubravnik?" said one of the men addressing me.

"Yes," I replied.

"And may I ask if this is the Princess d'Echeveria?"

"That is my name," replied Olga.

"I am very sorry to disturb you, but I must request you both to go with me, in the name of the Czar."

Olga started violently and turned one distrustful glance upon me, but I remained calm and unmoved.

"Do you mean that we are arrested?" she inquired indignantly, returning her gaze to the officer.

"Temporarily, princess. We were forced to make an arrest in the street near this house just now, and from one of the men taken we learned that we had to come here. I can say no more. You will come with us without resistance?"

"Arrested in the name of the Czar," murmured Olga blankly. "I did not anticipate this. Yes, I will go with you. Is my house to be searched?"

"I have no such orders, madame."

Then he turned to me.

"And you, sir?" he inquired.

"I am at your service," I said.

"One moment——" began Olga, who evidently doubted the regularity of it all, but I interposed.

"Princess," I said "I do not think that these men mean to treat us unkindly. It is evidently some official inquiry brought about by the arrest that he has mentioned. I think it decidedly best to go without question."

Her face flushed, but she said nothing more, but having had her wraps brought to her, followed me into the street, and we were soon driving rapidly away.

The men were thoughtful enough to give us the interior of the vehicle to ourselves, and as soon as we were seated Olga turned her wistful eyes towards me.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"It means that you are to be protected from the hands of your friends," I replied. "It means that I know that the Nihilists would take your life as soon as they know that you betrayed those who were waiting for me, and I do not propose that they shall have a chance. It means that I am going to place you for a time where no harm can come to you, and that not one of them will know where you are."

"But how, how have you the authority to do all this?"

"Did I not tell you that I am in the service of the Czar?"

"Of my worst enemy, yes."

"Is it not wise to compel your enemies to do your service?"

"Can I accept a service from one whom I hate as I do him?"

"I think so, if your life and mine are both dependent upon that service."

"But where are we going?"

"To the Vladek prison."

"I? Olga d'Echeveria, to *prison*?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"To the same place."

"How long are we to be detained there?"

"Only sufficient time for us to pass through it and take our departure by another door, to enter another carriage, and to be driven to the house of a friend."

"Ah! I begin to understand. To whose house, then?"

"To the house of Prince Michael."

"I cannot go there! Oh, indeed, I cannot go there!"

"You must disappear for a time, Olga. The prince is my friend and yours; more than that, he loves you, and, better than all, he is a prince among men as well as a prince among royalty. Will you not still trust to me?"

She sighed and said no more, but as the britska dashed onward she nestled closer to me, as though she found comfort in the thought that the authority was taken out of her hands, and when at last we came to a stop before the prison doors, she whispered:

"I trust you. Do with me as you will. I will obey."

Within the prison I found Canfield awaiting me, and I gave him and Coyle a few hurried instructions; but we were soon on the road again, and in due time arrived at the house of the prince, we passing in by a side entrance.

Presently, courtly and grave, but as white as mental suffering can render the face of a man, he came to us.

"You are welcome," he said, extending his hand, first to her and then to me. "The house is at your disposal, princess, and I need not say that there are no servants here to spy upon you. I know them all, and your presence will be as secret as the grave."

She thanked him, and was proceeding to explain some of the circumstances which had brought us there, when he stopped her with a gesture.

"It is true that I do not understand," he said, "but Dubravnik is my best friend, and he will tell me all that it is necessary to tell. In the mean time, I am commanded by his majesty, the Czar, to remain at the palace for a few days. Let me entreat you to regard everything here as your own."

"Twenty four hours will suffice, prince," I said. "After that time the princess can return in safety to her own home."

"Then, if you will excuse me," he murmured, bowing low over Olga's hand, "I will proceed at once to the palace, where I am even now expected. I will await you there, Dubravnik," he added, and the glance that he cast upon me made me wonder if I had not, perhaps, trusted—or, rather, tried—this chivalrous man too far, in taking the princess to his house.

Olga saw and rightly interpreted the glance, also, for as he left the room upon my assurance that I would follow him at once she put her hands in mine, and said:

"Are you indeed assured of your own safety, Dubravnik? I think I shall always call you by that name. Are you assured of your own safety? Tell me truly."

"Perfectly; and of yours, also. Have no fears."

Then I raised her hands to my lips, and kissed them both, first one and then the other, again and again; and she, standing on tiptoe, pressed her lips to my forehead.

"Love, honor, and obey," I murmured; and she repeated after me:

"Love, honor, and obey."

Then I left her.

It was still early in the day, but at that time of the year darkness settles over the earth while yet the day is young, and night was already abroad in the streets. I had much to do ere the dawn of another day, for the time had come when the power of the Brotherhood of Silence must be asserted; when I felt that the work that I had agreed to do for the Czar was nearly completed. My drag net was ready, and the time had come to cast it.

CHAPTER XII.—PRINCE MICHAEL'S ANGER.

NOBODY but myself, in all Russia, was familiar with the secrets and the mysteries of the Brotherhood of Silence. In organizing it I had anticipated just such a moment as the one that faced me now; i.e., an emergency where I would have to depend entirely upon the loyalty of my men, and my own superior knowledge of who and what they were, for my safety.

The partial description already given of that organization conveys only a faint idea of its perfection and completeness. The different departments were thoroughly under the control of their several heads, and those heads were all men whom I could implicitly trust, and I knew that I might even dare to snap my fingers at the power of the police system itself, so great was my own.

I had men everywhere, and the gift of remembering names and faces, a gift the Almighty had bestowed upon me, gave me the advantage of knowing nearly all of them by sight, although there was not a score, all told, who knew me; and those were every one importations of my own, upon whose devotion I could thoroughly depend, even in the face of regular police opposition.

More than that, I had men within the ranks of the police, even within the fold of the mysterious and dreaded third section.

I realized fully the danger to my own person in going upon the street at that hour, when I had within so short a time been condemned to death by the extremists—the most implacable element among the Nihilists.

They do not dread death themselves, so long as they accomplish the death of him who has been condemned, and one who has fallen under the ban of their disapproval is in as great danger in broad daylight, among a hundred companions, as he is on dark streets and among unfrequented byways.

I thought it best, therefore, to provide as well as possible against another

attempt to assassinate me, and therefore sought my own apartments before going to the palace. I intended to adopt a disguise of some kind, and, moreover, I had given orders for several of my leaders to meet me there, and I knew that I would find them waiting.

They were there when I arrived—Coyle, Canfield, Malet, St. Cyr, and with them several of their lieutenants.

There was another one there also, whose hands were tied behind him, and whose feet were fastened together, while, by way of additional security, he was tied to the chair in which my friends had seated him. That man was Ivan, the brother of Princess Olga.

I did not glance at him as I entered, but notwithstanding his presence, proceeded at once to business, instructing my men in exactly what they were to do that night.

He listened intently, first with anger and even rage, then with scorn and contempt, but finally with wonder and genuine fear.

In order to convey some idea of the moral effect that the meeting had upon him, I must outline a part of it. One by one my men read off lists of the Nihilists under their jurisdictions, accurately describing them, as well as the several disguises that they were in the habit of wearing, the meeting places of the different branches of the society, and where the members of those branches were to be found at certain hours.

Included in the lists were names of many prominent people in the city, officers in the army, policemen on duty, spies in private families, in hotels and cafés, in the palace, at the barracks, in the prisons, and, in fact, everywhere.

As name after name was read off, until the number amounted to many hundreds, the face of Ivan d'Echeveria became as pale as death, and when, at last, his own sister's name was read, and I remarked grimly that she was already a prisoner, and would be on her way to Siberia within the week, he broke out in curses and threats, to which, of course, not one of us paid the slightest attention.

When he found that we did not notice him in any way, but proceeded quietly with our business, he relapsed into a moody silence, and I knew that my moral lesson was working. I knew that I could save Olga's brother, for that is what I meant to do.

When the lists were completed, and I had given my orders regarding who was to be arrested that night, and who was to be spared, having directed that certain of them be told that they could obtain passports out of the country under certain conditions, I dismissed my leaders, and at last stood alone in the presence of Ivan.

"Now, sir," I said coldly, "what do you think of it?"

"I think that this night will see the end of our cause, until others are born, and grow up to know the wrongs to which the people of Russia have to submit. You may crush out Nihilism today, but you cannot crush it out forever. It will spring up again, like——"

"Like the poisonous weed that it is. I expect that, but this present growth will be cut down tonight. You do not ask what is to be done with you, Ivan."

"Why should I? I know."

"I am afraid that you do not."

"One who would send my beautiful sister to Siberia—Bah! I will not talk with you."

"Have I been unmerciful except to those who are confessed murderers, and those who are only awaiting a chance to kill?"

"No," he replied reluctantly.

"Do you not see how impossible it is to accomplish what your people want to do by the commission of crimes? You, who were one of the men waiting to kill me as soon as I came out of the house of your sister—what was your first thought when my men fell upon and arrested you? Did you not think that your sister had betrayed you all to me?"

"Yes."

"Did you not say so?"

He hung his face in shame and answered:

"Yes."

"Is that not the thought among your friends at this moment, and would the life of your sister be safe from them if she were in her own house tonight?"

"It would not."

"And yet, you call such people your friends—those who would without question put her to death on mere suspicion—to a death to which you have helped to condemn her by your foul suspicions, and the more foul utterance of them. Shame on you, Ivan d'Echeveria! Shame on you!"

Pain contorted his face, and he was silent.

"Did you fire the bullet that so nearly killed me?" I asked.

"No, I did not do that, but I directed that it be done. You would not have escaped if I had held the pistol."

"Perhaps not. It is unimportant, any way. Have you not wondered why I brought you to this house?"

"To torture me; that, at least, is what you are doing."

"I brought you here to save you."

"To save me!"

"Yes; from the folly of your youth. You are a man in years, but a boy in every act you commit. Have you manhood enough left in you to want to save your sister, who now, thanks to you, has two enemies to face? Russia would send her to Siberia, and the Nihilists would murder her. She would have sacrificed herself for you—she offered to do so. Are you as willing to sacrifice yourself for her?"

"God knows that I am."

"Will you prove it?"

"Oh, that I might!"

"You shall have the chance. I cannot quite trust you, Ivan, or, for her sake, I would loosen your bonds and set you free now. But you would hasten to your friends and warn them of their danger, and by that act you would destroy your sister forever—by that act you would kill her. She is safe and will be safe, if they are not warned of what is to happen tonight. Shall I set you free, and trust to your honor not to go to them?"

"No—no—no! For God's sake, no! Leave me bound! Tie me more tightly! Do not let me go! Kill me if you will, but do nothing to injure her. Oh, are you telling me the truth?"

"The whole truth, Ivan. I will leave you as you are until I return. I do not think that you will escape; I do not think that you will try to do so. But you must understand one thing: This night forever ends your connection with Nihilism. That is the sacrifice you must make to save your sister. Will you make it?"

"If it will save her, I will make it. But will it?"

"If I find you here when I return, and if you are still in the same mood, I will take you to her, and she shall reply to that question for herself."

I left him then, and having altered my appearance sufficiently so that I would not be recognized in the darkness, and being assured that the orders that I had given respecting the work of my men for that night would be carried out, I hastened to the palace.

I knew that I had a difficulty to face, for although I had unlimited confidence in the chivalry and generosity of Prince Michael, I also knew that he had an ungovernable temper, and I began to fear that my delay in following him might have led him to say something to the emperor, which would encompass me with puzzling conditions.

As soon as I arrived at the palace I was told that the prince was awaiting me in his apartments, and I hurried to him.

He rose as I entered the room, and, bowing stiffly, without extending his hand, as was his invariable habit, said coldly:

"You are late, Mr. Derrington. I expected you an hour earlier, at least."

"I am very sorry, prince," I replied, "more sorry than I can say, to have kept you waiting, but I have been unavoidably detained."

"May I ask if it was at my house?"

"I was at my own apartments."

"Ah!"

It was evident that he did not believe me, and that he meant me to understand that he did not, but I resolved that I would not quarrel with him. Therefore, I remained silent.

"May I venture to ask an explanation of the extraordinary proceedings of the evening?" he asked icily.

"Yes; I think I owe you that much. But would it not be better if I first offer my respects to the Czar? Then I can return here, and we can enjoy a long chat together."

"His majesty knows that you were to come to me first. After I have heard you, we will go to him together."

"Am I to understand, prince, that you have told his majesty anything of the occurrences of tonight?"

"You are to understand exactly that. I have told him all; at least all that I could tell."

"Indeed! In that case, we will go to him together. Such explanation as I have to make will be made in his presence. Whatever explanations there are to make are entirely in the princess' behalf, and I regret that I took you at

your word and supposed that you would wait for me. She can offer you her own thanks at a more opportune time."

I saw that he was endeavoring with all his strength to control himself, but the veins on his forehead swelled until I thought that they would burst.

For a full minute we stood facing each other thus, both silent, and then he turned and led the way in the direction of the official cabinet.

"Prince," I said, just before we entered, "you have no cause to quarrel with me. Remember that in the interview that is to come."

He stopped short, turned and faced me there before the door of the Czar's cabinet.

"Are you quite sure of that?" he demanded.

"I am quite sure. I remember another interview of this kind, when you advised me what not to do. You have no warmer friend in Russia than Daniel Derrington, prince."

For a moment he hesitated.

I saw that he was hesitating, for I knew that he really liked me. But I also knew that he loved the princess, and that he was jealous, for I had done an unprecedented thing in taking her to his house under the circumstances. For a woman to commit herself to the care of a man in the way that the princess had trusted herself to me, meant much more in Russia than it does in New York. The prince could find no excuse for the act; still less for my delay in following him when he left his own house in our possession.

Presently he spoke. His words came slowly and with careful deliberation.

"What I say now, Mr. Derrington, you may accept in whatsoever spirit you please, but, upon my soul, *I do not believe you!*"

I bowed, and we entered the cabinet together.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE CZAR DEFIED.

IN all the interviews that I had had with the Czar during the many months of my association with him, he had maintained the condition that he had himself made at the beginning, which was that we should meet on the basis of friends and equals. Whenever we were alone together he commanded me to forget that we were other than two friends who were enjoying an opportunity to chat with each other, and as at such times we invariably conversed in French, he always insisted that I should address him by the simple term "monsieur."

When the prince was with us, as was nearly always the case, the degree of familiarity was slightly, though hardly perceptibly, modified, and I must say that I had learned to enjoy such chats exceedingly.

For Alexander I had begun to feel a sincere affection. I doubt if there was any other man in Russia who understood him as thoroughly as I did. During the many long hours that we had passed together he had told me many things concerning himself, his ideas, and his hopes, which had revealed the real man—that is, the man behind the Czar—to me, and I knew that of the thousands of crimes attributed to him only a few had ever come to his knowledge until it was too late for him to interfere, or impolitic for him to do so.

Intellectually, he was not preponderant; indeed, rather deficient, but he was naturally a kindly disposed man, and at the beginning of his reign, and, indeed, through more than half of it, he proved that fact to the people. It was just before the time of my arrival in St. Petersburg that he allowed himself to fall more and more into the power of the nobles, who in reality ruled the empire, and who do so still.

Easily influenced by those in whom he trusted, thousands of crimes were committed in his name of which he had no idea, and of which he never heard. At all events, I liked him, and, moreover, I had thorough faith in my own influence over him.

In like proportion to my familiarity at court, and to his fondness for my society, I was cordially hated by the nobility; but as they feared me quite as much as they hated me, and as my real standing there remained a mystery, I was constantly fawned upon to a degree that was nauseating.

Even the story that I had so lately heard from the lips of the princess had not materially lessened the liking I felt for Alexander, for I could understand much better than she could all the influence that had been brought to bear upon the emperor not to pardon the woman in whose possession had been found cyanide of potassium, intended for his wine. I did not believe that he had intended that she should go to the island of Saghalien; I did not believe that he could be held accountable for the evils that befell poor Yvonne in the isolated garrisons of Siberia. He believed that she intended to poison him, and he banished her; there his part of the evil ceased.

The awful things that happened in those garrisons he did not know about, could not hear about, for I believe, among all his friends, I was the only one who dared to tell him the truth. Even the prince lied to him, for I had often heard him do so.

As to the killing of Stanislaus, who could blame the Czar for that? The man had endeavored to kill him; had twice snapped a pistol in his face, and still held it in his hand when the emperor tore it from his grasp and struck him on the head with it. Who would not do the same?

I repeat all this as my excuse for still feeling that affection for him which our intercourse had taught me.

The real criminal in the case of the story of Yvonne was Durnief. Him I hated, and his name was on one of the lists that had been read off to me before going to the palace that night. There were special orders concerning him, too—but that will be dealt with later.

Now, as I entered the cabinet with the prince, I confess that I had some doubts concerning my reception, for I had no idea what the prince had said to his majesty, and I knew only too well his disposition to listen to anything that had a suspicious side to it, particularly if that suspicion concerned one of his closest and most intimate associates.

I could at any time, within five minutes, have poisoned the mind of the Czar against the prince; I did not doubt that he could accomplish the same delicate attention for me.

The prince preceded me, and the Czar rose as we entered.

He was alone, and I advanced at once, with extended hand, as he had often

requested me to do when I discovered him thus; but he bowed coldly, feigning not to see it.

I halted, drew myself up, and returned his bow in the same manner that he had given it. Then I waited for him to speak.

"You are late, sir," he said. "You have kept me waiting."

"I was not aware that your majesty expected me," I replied. "Otherwise I should have been here sooner."

"The prince expected you, and led me to do the same."

"Had the prince done me the honor to tell me that he intended to receive me in your cabinet, I should have understood. The prince—perhaps unintentionally—deceived me."

Prince Michael flushed hotly, but said nothing. The Czar smiled grimly.

"What detained you?" he demanded.

"The business which detains me in Russia, your majesty."

"Ah; you were concerned in the work of the Brotherhood?"

"I was."

"I understood that you were much more pleasurably employed."

"Whoever gave you so to understand either did not know or lied."

I turned so that I half faced the prince, and I saw that he made a motion as if to spring upon and strike me; but he did not dare to commit such an act in the Czar's presence, and long training got the better of his temper.

"Why, sir, did you take the Princess Olga d'Echeveria to the house of Prince Michael?" continued the Czar.

"Because I believed him to be an honorable man, who would stand ready to protect her good name, and conceal from all the world, even from your majesty, the fact that she was there. Because he had told me that he loved her, and I was innocent enough to believe that his love was unselfish; and further, because I regarded him as my friend. There are three reasons, your majesty, any one of which seems to me to be sufficient."

"But why was it necessary to take her anywhere?"

"That, your majesty, is a question which I must answer to you alone."

"Do you mean that you will not tell the prince?"

"I mean that it was my intention to tell the prince as soon as I reached the palace, but that now I deem it unnecessary. He has taught me a lesson in hospitality that is as new as it is unique."

"Perhaps she will explain the strange affair herself."

"I have no doubt that she will, your majesty."

"I have sent for her. She will remain here in the palace as long as danger threatens her. She should be here by now."

"May I inquire of your majesty whom you sent?"

"The captain of the palace guard."

"Captain Durnief?"

"Yes."

I looked at my watch, replaced it in my pocket, and then said calmly:

"Captain Durnief will not return with the princess, your majesty."

Then I saw the heavy frown of rising anger. I knew my man, for kings and emperors are less than men of the world when it comes to studying them.

Their own opportunities for observing others are so much more limited. The Czar angry, was a much easier man to influence than the Czar satirical.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Why will Durnief fail to carry out my personal orders? Dare the princess refuse to accompany him?"

"She most certainly would not have the bad taste to refuse, and if she did, the captain would doubtless bring her by force, only he has the misfortune to be now a prisoner."

"Durnief a prisoner? The captain of my personal guard arrested? By your order, sir?"

"By my order, your majesty."

"You have dared to do this?"

"I would dare to arrest the prince, or your own son, if I found him inimical to your interests, and I beg you to understand that I gave the order before I knew that you had sent him on the errand for the princess."

"It is a lie!"

It was the prince who spoke; but before I could reply to the accusation, the Czar waved his hand and commanded silence.

"Was it the princess who informed you that Durnief was a Nihilist?" he asked calmly, the smile returning to his face.

"No," I replied, understanding the motive behind the question, for I could read the Czar like a book, and I already knew much concerning the villainy of Durnief, "but it was he who informed you that she was one."

"By heaven, Derrington, you know too much. I begin to think that the days of your usefulness are past in St. Petersburg. There seems to be no limit to the authority that you assume, and now you have begun to dictate to me. I will not have it. I command that you tell me why you thought it necessary to take the princess from her own house tonight."

I knew that the crucial moment had come. I knew that if I weakened now I was lost. The only possible escape for me was to see the Czar alone, and that I determined to do. The manner of the prince upon my arrival at the palace, his conduct in the cabinet, the greeting that the Czar had vouchsafed me, and his bearing towards me since then, led me to a shrewd guess, and I determined to hazard it, and to play my last card, so to speak, by making one bold statement.

"Your majesty," I said deliberately, "has never until now had less than perfect confidence in me. The prince, being jealous, and too impatient to await an explanation at my hands, has prevailed upon you to order me under arrest for a time, in order that I may not return to his house, where I left the princess. If I do not mistake, he now has such an order, signed by you in person, in one of his pockets. Permit me to tell you and him that there is another reason why he procured that order, for my men at this moment have instructions to place him under arrest. He only sought to anticipate me, that is all. Order him to his apartments, and to remain in them, for unless I am free to act as I see fit this night, I would not give that"—and I snapped my fingers—"for the life of a single member of the royal family."

Then I folded my arms and waited.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE HERMIT'S SECRET.*

BY OLIVER OPTIC.

A story of the Northwest, in which a strange hero figures—Why Paul Gayland left a comfortable home and a doting foster father—His experiences as master of a steam yacht and the strange consequences of a tattooing.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

A THOUSAND dollar bill has been stolen from Ward Gayland, a wealthy resident of the city of St. Paul, and suspicion rests upon his nephew Sparks, and his adopted son Paul. The former is proved to have committed the theft. Mrs. Gayland, however, refuses to believe him guilty, and so much bitterness is aroused in the household that next morning Paul cannot be found, having decided to quit the house. The following midnight the capitalist and his wife are awakened by the sound of persons in the house. Hastening into the hall they see two men rush out, and as they reach the foot of the stairs a younger man dashes past them from the dining-room and both Mr. and Mrs. Gayland are certain that they recognize Paul.

The scene shifting to Lake Minnetonka, Paul is discovered to be the captain of the handsome little steamer Hebe. He goes under the name of Phil Greenway, and has a young fellow he calls "Bashy" for his engineer. During a storm Phil rescues several passengers from a boat that has met with misfortune, among them a Mrs. Forbush, who, as soon as she sets eyes on him, calls him Conny Forbush and declares that he is her adopted son, who ran away from her two years ago. The Hebe's captain listens patiently to her narrative, and then repeats that it is all entirely new to him, and that he never saw Mrs. Forbush before meeting her that day on the lake.

When Phil, after some further adventures, returns to the shanty on the lake where he and Bashy live, and which he calls the Hermitage, he finds it occupied by two intruders, in one of whom he recognizes Sparks Gayland, but who now calls himself, it seems, Gay Sparkland. Unseen, Phil listens to the conversation between him and his companion whom he calls Roddy, and from which it is apparent that not only have they appropriated a large sum of money in Minneapolis that does not belong to them, but are planning to rob a bank. Later, before retiring, they place a traveling bag containing six thousand two hundred dollars in the closet where Phil is concealed. He takes possession thereof, substitutes a wad of paper, and slipping out of the shanty while the thieves sleep, wakes Bashy and hastens to Minneapolis with his treasure and his tidings.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—A MIDNIGHT SUMMONS IN ST. PAUL.

PHIL GREENWAY'S first visit to Minnetonka had brought him to Excelsior, the town and village on the southern shore of the lake, and he had taken possession of the Hebe at this place, so that he knew its geography very well and made the landing at the low pier without asking any questions.

He bought his provisions and other supplies there, which had required him to make occasional visits to the town, and the large bill he brought with him on his coming had been changed at the bank there by Bashy, for he did not care to subject himself to suspicion by a visit in person.

"I shall not return before some time tomorrow, Bashy; and I want you to make yourself as comfortable as possible till I come back," said the captain.

* This story began in the July issue of THE ARGOSY. The five back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 50 cents.

"I guess I can do that, for there is grub enough left in the forward cabin for my breakfast," replied Bashy.

"You may go to one of the hotels and get a hot breakfast, and I will pay for it," added Phil, as he took the plethoric pocketbook from the inside of his vest.

"What there is on hand is good enough for me; put up your money, Captain Greenway," answered the engineer.

"I did not take out my money to pay for your breakfast, though I prefer that you should get a good meal at one of the hotels."

"All right, then; if you prefer it, I will go to the White House."

"I do prefer it," replied the captain, as he opened the pocketbook by the light of a lantern the engineer had brought into the pilot house.

Bashy could hardly repress sundry exclamations that came to his lips when he saw what a pile of bills the captain had in his possession; but he "held in," as he called it, while the superior counted out three of the notes, and tendered them to the engineer.

"Hundred dollar bills!" exclaimed Bashy, actually retreating in his amazement at the sight of so much money, for the pile in possession of his companion seemed to be composed of this denomination.

"These are for you, Bashy," added the captain, quietly, spreading out the bills so that the engineer could see that there were three of them.

"To pay for my breakfast?" gasped the assistant.

"Not at all; whatever you pay for your breakfast I will hand you when I return," replied Phil, looking at his watch to make sure that he did not lose the train.

"Three hundred dollars!" exclaimed the astonished engineer. "Did I understand you to say that this money was for me, Captain Greenway?"

"That is precisely what I intended that you should understand, but you don't seem to catch on," laughed Phil, finding he had plenty of time.

"You don't expect a fellow like me to catch on to three hundred dollars, do you?" demanded Bashy, who could not realize that his companion was in earnest.

"I hope you will make an effort to do so. Take the bills, for I have not much time to spare; and then I will explain the matter," answered Phil.

"Is this some of the money you took from them chaps that stole the Hermitage?" asked the doubtful engineer, as he accepted the bills.

"Not a dollar of it. Do you remember that as we were passing Cook's Point yesterday, a boat came off and brought a letter to me?"

"Of course I remember it, for the landlord of the Lake Park Hotel brought the letter, and wanted a receipt for it. But what has that to do with this three hundred dollars you are giving me?"

"It has a great deal to do with it. In that letter were ten one hundred dollar bills, which the lady in the Excelsior sent me for our services in saving her and her companion," the captain explained.

"A thousand dollars!" exclaimed Bashy. "That was liberal pay for the job. But, creation! You don't think of giving me three hundred dollars of it, for I am only a poor chicken working for wages?"

"That is what I shall give you as your share; and this is the way I figure it out; and if you are not satisfied with the division, I want you to say so, and not make any bones about it."

"Satisfied with the division? It is ten times as much as I had any right to look for; and I did not expect a single cent for anything I did. It was you that handled the boat, and every cent of the money ought to stay in your pocket, where it belongs," protested Bashy, who sincerely felt all that he said.

"You did your part as well as I did mine; but I think the Hebe did more than either of us, and I put her down for four hundred dollars of the reward," continued Phil. "If the money goes into my pocket, it is only to pay me back a part of what the boat cost me."

"That's perfectly fair; and if the Hebe could eat grub, I would take her up to the hotel to breakfast with me tomorrow morning," remarked Bashy.

"I think it's a fair thing; I went on a fishing trip once, and in dividing the proceeds of the catch the vessel took the lion's share, as it was just that she should; and I have gone on that principle in this case. The remaining six hundred dollars I have halved with you."

"You are too liberal, Captain Greenway; one hundred is enough for me," said Bashy.

"An equal division is what I shall insist on having; and I have no more time to talk about it. Put the money in your pocket, and perhaps you will soon be able to buy a steamer for yourself, especially if we should have another hurricane, and some other craft is not well handled."

Bashy was sincere and he made some further objection, to which the captain would not listen, and at last he put the bills in his pocket, though not till Phil had left him; and then very likely he dreamed of being some time the owner of such a steamer as the Hebe, which he believed was the finest craft of her size on the lake.

Phil Greenway walked through the streets to the station, and on his way he passed the bank, which he believed was the next objective point of the gentlemen in possession of the Hermitage, though they had not said so in so many words.

"Minneapolis or St. Paul?" asked the station agent, when he called for his ticket.

"Does this train go to St. Paul?" he asked.

"Single or return?" asked the agent, when he had mentioned St. Paul as the destination.

"Return," replied Phil, as he handed out his money.

He was not posted in regard to the trains, and had not noticed on the table that the trains on this road went through to the farther of the twin cities, and he was decidedly pleased to find that he should reach his old home, or the city that contained it, without any delay, and before midnight.

He had plenty to think about on the way, and he considered whether or not to pay a midnight visit to his benefactor and make a confidant of him; but he was unable to decide this question before his arrival, and he was willing to leave his action to be controlled by circumstances.

On the arrival of the train at its destination he hastened with all the speed

he could command to the residence of Mr. Cavan, the real estate agent and friend of Mr. Gayland.

He was confident that, as the capitalist had called in the ex detective when the thousand dollar bill disappeared, he had done the same thing when the safe was robbed of six times as large a sum.

He had often been to the house on errands, and he was able to find it in the darkness of the night without any difficulty; and he did not hesitate to ring the bell vigorously, for he felt that the business upon which he had come from the lake justified his call at this unseemly hour.

He repeated the ring several times before he obtained any response.

"Who's there? The doctor lives next door on the left!" said a man in a night shirt, putting his head out of the window over the front door, expressing himself with no little impatience, and it was possible that others had made the mistake his reply suggested.

"I don't want the doctor; I wish to see Mr. Cavan on the most important business," replied the midnight visitor.

"Call at the office in the morning. I don't do business at this hour of the night," answered the agent.

"I have six thousand dollars with me, and I must carry it off with me if you don't let me in."

"Who are you?" demanded the prudent business man.

"Paul Gayland."

In five minutes more Mr. Cavan was at the door.

CHAPTER XXXV.—AN INTERVIEW WITH THE EX DETECTIVE.

"WHAT did you say your name was?" asked Mr. Cavan, as he opened the door wide enough to obtain a look at the visitor at this late hour.

"Paul Gayland," replied the captain in the most decided tone he could command.

The real estate agent opened his door a little wider, for evidently he did not recognize the young man in his blue yacht uniform and white cap; but he had lighted the gas in the hall of his house, and its aid enabled him to see the face of the visitor.

"Come in, if you please, and let me have a better look at you," said Mr. Cavan, resuming his natural politeness. "It's a month since I saw you last, and you don't look as you did then."

"I cannot have changed very much in that time, though I wear different clothes," added Phil.

"All right, young man; I know you now, and I hope you are very well," continued Mr. Cavan, extending his hand to the midnight caller.

"Quite well, I thank you; never better," replied the captain, taking the proffered hand. "I hope Mr. Gayland is in good health, for I have not heard a word from him or of him since I went away."

"He is very well, though I think he misses you very much, and he seems to be rather melancholy, like a man who has been disappointed in this life and is looking forward to one more hopeful. You left his house rather sud-

denly, Paul," said the agent, looking very keenly into the face of his young visitor.

"Suddenly to others, but not to myself, for I had been thinking of leaving for months before I went," replied Phil.

"I suppose you are aware that certain persons are looking for you," continued the agent.

"If they are, they have not been where I was, for I was not even aware of the fact that a search for me had been made."

"It is very unfortunate that you left at just the particular time you did," said Cavan, looking sharply at him again.

"Why so?" asked Phil, with what seemed to be innocent surprise.

"If you had left the night after the robbery instead of the night before, it would have been better," suggested the agent.

"What robbery?" asked Phil, though he was not much surprised to hear of such an event.

"Didn't you know that Mr. Gayland's house had been entered, his safe opened, and over six thousand dollars taken from it?" asked the ex detective, toying with a pen on the table at his side.

"I had no actual knowledge of it, but I suspected as much from information which I obtained within six hours," replied Phil, as he took his pocket-book from the inside of his vest and proceeded to open it on the table, at which he had seated himself opposite the agent.

He had placed the money he had taken from the burglar's bag in a compartment by itself, and he took out the pile without exhibiting the rest of his money, and held it in his hand, while he turned his eyes again to the business agent of his benefactor.

"Can you tell me the exact amount taken from Mr. Gayland's house?" he asked.

"Six thousand two hundred dollars; nothing but the money was taken," replied Cavan, promptly.

"Will you be kind enough to count this money, Mr Cavan?" said Phil, and he passed the package of bills to him.

"Certainly, if you desire it;" and he suited the action to the word; and, as the amount was all in large bills, it took him but a couple of minutes, though he went over it twice. "Six thousand two hundred dollars," he added, as he passed the money back to the young man.

"I will thank you to retain it, and give it to Mr. Gayland, for it appears that the amount is correct," continued the captain of the Hebe.

"I will do as you request and give you a receipt for the money," replied Cavan, as he wrote the document and handed it to the visitor.

"I think I have done my duty now," added Phil, as he put the receipt into his pocketbook, and returned it to its place inside of his vest.

"I suppose you have so far as this money is concerned," said the agent, with a heavy frown on his brow, as though he did not entirely appreciate the honesty of the captain.

In fact a great change had come over his face, or the expression of it, and he looked like a disappointed man.

He had said to his wealthy client, after he finished his investigation of the robbery, that he was willing to bet his life that Paul was innocent, in spite of the condemning appearances against him.

But now the real estate agent considered himself obliged to change his mind. He could not help believing that Paul Gayland had really been guilty of stealing the money, which he now, through some feeling of remorse, wished to return to its rightful owner.

"What more can I do?" asked Phil, surprised at the qualification in the reply of the other.

"This appears to be a case of conscience," replied the agent, still frowning heavily in his disappointment, derived from the honest deed of his visitor. "You stole the money; but your conscience, and perhaps the remembrance of what Mr. Gayland has been to you and done for you, has compelled you to restore your swag to its rightful owner."

"I stole the money!" gasped the wanderer, springing out of his chair, his brown cheeks mantled with crimson.

"That is precisely what Mrs. Gayland believes and insists upon, and Mr. Gayland is unable to gainsay the charge; and that is precisely what it looks like to me now, though I have given your foster father all the hope he has had that you were possibly innocent," added Mr. Cavan, rising from his chair also.

"Did you tell Mr. Gayland that I was innocent of this crime?" asked the wanderer, the tears flooding his eyes.

"I told him I believe you were innocent, and I have thought so till now," replied the agent, resuming his seat when his guest did so to drop his head upon the table, covering his face with both hands and weeping like one with a broken heart.

The ex detective looked at the sufferer, and possibly his feelings were moved by the violence of his grief, though it might be the agony of repentance rather than of wounded sensibility at the injustice done him.

"You were right, Mr. Cavan!" exclaimed the wanderer, springing to his feet again, throwing back his head, and assuming a majestic air of manhood, which a hero might have exhibited in the hour of his triumph.

"I believe you!" returned the agent, after he had looked the young man's face for a moment.

He extended his hand to Phil and bestowed a warm pressure on that of his visitor; for after all it is a very great comfort for any one to believe he was right in the face of conflicting evidence, though he may be mistaken in the end.

"I never even heard of the robbery until a few hours ago; and even then it did not occur to me that I was suspected," said Phil.

"Perhaps you had better tell me all about the matter, as you understand it," suggested Mr. Cavan. "I may add that the testimony against you is very strong, and while I believe you are innocent, I do not see how the fact can be established."

"I don't know anything at all about the robbery, and never heard of it till five o'clock this afternoon, and then only by guessing at half of it," Phil protested.

He began his narrative at once, starting it at the time when he left the

mansion on the hill, and relating all that had occurred as set forth in these chapters, to the moment when he rang the bell at Mr. Cavan's door.

"Are you absolutely sure that one of the pair that took possession of the Hermitage was Sparks Gayland?" asked the agent, when he had finished.

"I am absolutely sure it was he, though the other fellow called him 'Gay Sparkland,'" answered the captain.

"That is a transposition of the syllables of his real name; and for purposes of concealment the change is as stupid as some other things Sparks has done. But you say that he was one of the burglars, though I am not at all surprised at it, for I have long believed him capable of such a venture, though his uncle knows less about him than almost any other person in the city. If he was one of them, it proves, almost, that you were not another."

"Then I am suspected of being one who entered the house?" said Phil, deeply grieved at the thought of the sorrow the suspicion must have given his benefactor.

"Suspected!" exclaimed Mr. Cavan. "You were both seen and recognized by Mr. Gayland and by his wife."

The wanderer was utterly confounded by this statement.

CHAPTER XXXVI.—CAPTAIN GREENWAY HAS A NEW IDEA.

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Cavan, that I was seen in Mr. Gayland's house on the night of this robbery?" demanded Phil Greenway, his chest heaving with emotion.

"I do not mean to say that I saw you there; but I do mean to say that both Mr. Gayland and his wife saw you; and they know you well enough to be subject to no ordinary mistake," replied the ex detective. "The servant came for me shortly after midnight, and I went to the house at once. Then and there they told me they had seen you come out of the diningroom, pass through the hall where they were, and leave by the front door."

"Did I speak to them?" asked Phil, almost breathless with astonishment.

"You did not, for you were in a hurry to get out of the house; but all the gas burners in the house were lighted, and they were positive that it was you."

"I am equally positive that it was not I," protested Phil, dropping into his chair, overwhelmed by the statement of the agent.

"I don't understand it," added Mr. Cavan. "You have been in the house with them for years, the front hall was as light as day, and they could hardly have made a mistake in regard to your identity."

The captain looked up into the face of the agent to determine, if he could, whether or not he believed what he said; but his expression conveyed no information to satisfy him, for he seemed to be as thoroughly mystified as the young man himself.

"I am willing to swear in any court in Christendom that I was on the border of Lake Minnetonka during the night on which this robbery was committed," said Phil, beginning to gather up his forces to meet the mysterious assertion of the agent.

"Are you sure on this point?" asked Mr. Cavan.

"Absolutely sure, for it was the night after I left St. Paul, and I fix the time by that fact. You can see that it would be impossible for me to be mistaken," continued Phil.

"I should say that it was; and perhaps you can prove what you say by witnesses if it becomes necessary to do so?"

"I think I could."

"Where did you spend the night on which the break was made?"

"On the day after I left I went on to Lake Minnetonka, and spent the day there, making a trip on the Hebe to Halsted's Bay, and that afternoon I made an offer for the steamer. I slept that night on board of the Hebe, by invitation of the person in charge of her, to whom I made the offer."

"That sounds like a clear statement, and that person is your witness if he did not leave you on board of the boat."

"He did not leave me, for he slept in the forward cabin with me, and we both turned out at five o'clock in the morning. Bashy will be willing to testify that I must have remained in the cabin all night, for we did not turn in till eleven o'clock. We were busy talking about the steamer I wanted to buy."

"Who is Bashy?"

"He is the engineer of the Hebe."

"I can make nothing of these two stories, for each one contradicts the other," said the agent, and he looked as though he were thoroughly perplexed; and his visitor was in no better condition.

"I am as much in the dark as you are, and I can make nothing of it," Phil went on. "If Mrs. Gayland were the only one who saw me, I could understand it better."

"Mr. Gayland was as positive as his wife was," continued Cavan, looking earnestly into the face of his visitor. "Did it ever occur to you, Paul, that Mr. Gayland might be your father?" he asked, after a little hesitation.

"It has occurred to me, for he has always treated me as well as the most affectionate father could treat a son; and there is something else which encouraged this idea," replied Phil.

"What is that? It needs something stronger than the facts on the surface to account for his devotion to you," added the agent.

In answer to the question Phil took off his coat, stripped up his sleeve, and exhibited the letters on his arm.

"P. G.," said the agent, reading the letters. "They certainly stand for Paul Gayland."

"But my foster father explains them by saying that he found them on my arm when he assumed the care of me in Nice, and he gave me the first name after one of his brothers."

"Nice?"

"You have not heard the story of my adoption; and if you are not too sleepy, I will give it to you," said Phil.

"I am wide awake, and I should be glad to hear it; for this is the biggest romance that I have met with in late years," answered the agent, settling himself into his armchair.

The captain of the Hebe told the story as it had been related to him by both the capitalist and his wife; and the listener gave the closest attention to it.

"But in spite of that story, Mr. Gayland may be your father," said Cavan, when the young man had finished his narrative. "He may have been secretly married for reasons of his own, and did not care to reveal the facts to his young wife, or let her know that he had a son. Such things have happened, and I had something to do with a case in New York not unlike it."

"The only difficulty I have in believing that such a thing might be is in the fact that Mr. Gayland is an honest and true man; and he said that I was not his son," was Phil's comment.

"Of course he could not acknowledge you. But I have not mentioned the fact which suggested this idea to me, Paul," continued Cavan. "If you were only his adopted son, and he found that you were a villain, wicked enough to rob his house after he had given you a thousand dollars only the day before, he would have been willing to drop you, cast you out like an unclean thing, and let you go to prison where you deserved to be."

"I think so myself."

"Instead of doing this he is deeply grieved at your conduct, and is ready to save you from the consequences of the alleged crime. Only himself, his wife and I know that you visited the house as one of the burglars, for he almost swore me to secrecy, and insisted that his wife should not mention the fact."

"He seems to be even more devoted to me than I had supposed," added Phil, wiping the moisture from his eyes.

"I have not seen him for a month when he did not repeat his injunction to be silent in regard to you; and he told me he had even threatened his wife if she ever betrayed the secret."

"I don't understand the relations between Sparks Gayland and his aunt; but she seems to be quite as much devoted to him as her husband is to me," said Phil, looking to the agent for a possible explanation.

"He is a good looking young fellow, and he has done everything he could to work himself into her good graces, evidently for the purpose of obtaining her influence with her husband in the disposal of his property. But Sparks has ruined himself."

"I should say that he had if the whole truth comes out."

"It must come out!" exclaimed Cavan, manifesting more excitement than he was in the habit of displaying. "If I hand this money over to Mr. Gayland, saying that you brought it to me, it will look to him as it did to me, that you had simply concluded to return your ill gotten gain. That will not do just yet. You said that the two burglars had another job on their hands."

"I did;" and Phil repeated some portion of his former narrative.

"Possibly it will be better to let them carry out their plan; and then there will be no doubt about their intentions, for the return of this money by you has a bad look."

Just then, with the remembrance of what he had heard at the shanty repeated a moment before, something more of the talk of the burglars came back to him, and he leaped out of his chair as a new train of ideas came into his mind with startling force.

"What is the matter, Paul? You were the most indifferent fellow I ever saw when we unearthed that thousand dollar bill; but now you seem to be excited," said the agent.

"Those villains spoke of another fellow that belonged with them," replied Phil, after reflecting a moment, as though he had been stunned with a new idea.

Then he was sure he had a clue to the mystery.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—MR. CAVAN'S PLAN.

As Mr. Cavan suggested, Phil Greenway was not a demonstrative young man, but he was certainly excited when the clock struck one in an adjoining room; but it was clear that he had not yet clearly defined the idea which had stunned him in its advent.

He resumed his seat at the table, and the wrinkles on his brow indicated that he was bringing his thought to bear upon the subject his sudden recollection had sprung upon him, and he said nothing for a few minutes.

The agent realized that he was struggling at the birth of a new idea and was laboring to develop its meaning; and he sensibly held his peace to enable his companion to settle his thoughts.

"I begin to see through the whole of it," said he at last. "Roddy and——"

"Who is Roddy?" interposed the agent, who was not willing to let any point escape his understanding.

"Roddy is the companion of Sparks Gayland in his new enterprise, and the chief of the burglars, a cool headed rascal who has drawn Sparks into his clutches, and uses him as an assistant. But they spoke of a third person who was connected with them, and said he was not more than sixteen years old."

"What has he to do with all this?"

"That is what I am trying to explain to myself. Some one went to Mr. Gayland's house on the night of the robbery with Roddy and Sparks; and this third person was mistaken for me."

"Mr. Gayland and his wife were positive it was you; and they knew you well enough to believe they could not be mistaken," added Cavan.

"Let me give you another incident of my experience at Minnetonka," continued the captain, relating the event of the hurricane, and the saving of the passengers and crew of the Excelsior.

"That seems to be another story," interposed the agent, rather impatiently.

"Wait a moment, if you please, and you will see that it is a part of the same story," answered Phil, with a very expressive smile on his brown face. "After we went ashore, the lady invited me to her parlor at the Lake Park Hotel, though not till she had called me by a name I never heard before, and insisted that I was somebody else."

"Mistook you for another?" said Cavan, with an effort to repress a gape.

"That is just what she did; and she would have it that I was her adopted son, and called me Conny."

"Didn't she know her adopted son?"

"She would have it that I was he, though he had run away from her a year or two before. I could not convince her to the contrary for a long time; and she told me very nearly the same story that Mr. Gayland and his wife related to me to show how I happened to be with them, stating first that it was in Malaga, and then changing the place to Dresden."

"Didn't she know where the event occurred?"

"She told me wrong first as a trick to see if I did not detect the difference in the story; and when she found I did not notice the error, she changed the name of the place."

Phil repeated the narrative of Mrs. Forbush more in detail than he had given it at first; and as the ex detective began to see the bearing of the incident, he ceased to gape.

"Once more," continued the captain, "Roddy told Sparks that the third person of the trio had seen a lady at the West Hotel who might identify him, and he wanted to keep out of sight. That brings the several incidents into close connection, I should say."

"I believe you, my lad."

"Roddy called the third member of the trio Chick Gilpool, which is not likely to be his real name," added Phil.

"And you say that the lady, after she had looked at the initials on your arm, expected to find C. G. there. There seems to be a hole in the curtain, and we can soon see what is behind it," said the agent, who had become as much interested in the matter as though he expected to make ten thousand dollars out of it.

"There was another incident at the lake yesterday, though I cannot connect it with the robbery in any manner," continued the captain, recalling the affair of the steam launch, and the singular conduct of Mr. Arnold Blonday.

"Then we will let it rest till another time," added Mr. Cavan, rising from his chair as though he had business on his hands. "You have done your errand here, and done it well, Paul."

"I have done a good deal more than I intended when I came here, for I did not think of telling you anything more than was necessary to explain how the six thousand dollars came into my possession. I have related the rest of my experience in self defense."

"What do you intend to do next?" asked the agent.

"It was my purpose to take the first train for the lake, which leaves at seven in the morning."

"Will you go with me now to Mr. Gayland's house, and tell him what you have told me?"

"No, sir! I will not! I will never go into his presence, and especially not into the presence of Mrs. Gayland, till I can prove my innocence of the charge against me," replied the captain, with a blush on his cheeks.

"I will not insist upon it," replied Mr. Cavan, as he put the money Phil had brought him into his pocketbook. "What are you going to do when you get back to the lake?"

"I had not decided what to do when I left. You have had more experi-

ence in such matters than I have, and the right kind of experience, too; and I should like to have you advise me what to do," suggested Phil.

"If I had had the direction of the case a little earlier, I should have advised you to let the two intruders remain in full possession of your shanty, and carry out their original plan of robbing the bank, as you suspect that they intend to do."

"I thought of that myself; but I could not take the responsibility of keeping the money any longer."

"Perhaps we can rectify the error," continued Cavan, pursing his lips and contracting his brow as he paused to reflect.

"I have perfect confidence in your judgment, and will do just what you say," said Phil.

"Paul, I am going to Minnetonka with you!" exclaimed the agent suddenly. "I am as much concerned to prove your innocence as you can be yourself, for I have fully committed myself in that direction, having declared that I believed you innocent."

"You are very kind, sir; and I have no right to expect so much of you," replied Phil, who really felt as though his innocence was already established with such a powerful and skilful person to assist him.

"There is only one difficulty in the way. An old friend of mine who lived in New York when I was there, wrote me that he should arrive at the Ryan last evening, and wished to see me on business of the utmost importance early in the morning. I must see him."

Cavan was troubled by the clashing of this engagement with his intention to accompany the captain to the lake; but after he had considered the subject for a few minutes, he appeared to have arrived at a solution of the difficult problem.

"I think we had better not wait for the train in the morning, Paul," said he. "I should like to be on the ground before these fellows are stirring, and I think I can manage it."

The captain asked no questions, and the agent went to his room to finish his toilet; but he returned fully dressed for the street in a few minutes, and they left the house together, making their way to the Ryan House as soon as possible.

"I thought I should find you coming into the house at about this time," said Cavan, accosting a gentleman he found smoking his cigar at the door.

"I am off a little earlier than usual tonight; but I have to return to the station again soon," replied the smoker.

"I want to get to Lake Minnetonka in the shortest possible time," continued the agent, as the gentleman threw away the stump of his cigar, and looked at the clock.

"I have to send a freight train over to the mills, near there, in about half an hour, and you may go in the caboose, Cavan. To what part of the lake do you want to go?"

"To Excelsior," replied the captain, when the agent looked at him.

"I will send you the rest of the way on the engine, if you like."

"Thank you, Brooks; the engine will do. We will be at the freight sta-

tion in half an hour," replied Cavan, going to the office of the hotel, where he examined the register, after giving the night clerk his pocketbook to deposit in the safe. Then he pointed to a name on the book.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—THE GENTLEMAN FROM CHICAGO.

" 'DAVID WESTLAWN,' " continued Mr. Cavan, reading the name on the register at which he pointed. " I want to see this gentleman at once, for he is an old friend of mine," he added, turning to the night clerk.

" Do you wish to have him called, Mr. Cavan?" asked the clerk.

" No; I will see him in his room, for I was to meet him in the morning, and I have to leave the city at once."

A servant was called and directed to show the gentleman to Mr. Westlawn's room, and the agent told the captain he had better go up with him, which Phil was quite willing to do.

" David Westlawn has had hard luck in business, for he lost all he had in Chicago, though he was well off when he went there," said Cavan, as he walked up the stairs. " He employed me to look up a couple of children about seven or eight years old, and I told him in the end they had been sent to Paris to attend a school there."

" A couple of children!" exclaimed Phil. " Where did they live?"

" In New York."

" Were they lost?"

" No; I don't remember much about the case now; but to the best of my recollection, the children were his nieces or nephews, and he had been told they were sent to Paris to attend a school, for their mother was a French lady. For some reason which he did not explain, or which I have forgotten, he did not believe the statement. But I found the steamer in which they were taken to Paris with another uncle, or something of that sort; and my report satisfied him. After that David and I became strong friends, and have had business relations in the West."

" Is his business now about the two children?" asked Phil.

" Of course not, for that matter is eight years old; and I don't think he ever mentioned the subject to me again."

" Some real estate operation then," suggested the captain.

" I don't know; I have done no detective work for years, and he cannot wish to see me on account of the old affair. I have forgotten all about my old cases, and very likely I have not stated the matter of the children exactly as it was. But I have all my old notes of cases in the house," replied Cavan, as the servant stopped at the door.

The agent knocked vigorously on the panel, and the summons was answered by a sleepy demand on the part of the occupant of the room.

" Who's there?" he asked a minute later.

" Cavan," replied the ex detective. " I want to see you at once."

" All right; I will open the door in a minute," responded the guest.

Presently Mr. Westlawn opened the door, and showed himself, dressed only in his night shirt and trousers.

"Come in, Cavan; I am glad to see you, though I did not expect to have a call from you before morning," said the guest, as he grasped the hand of his old friend.

"I have to go away in half an hour, and I have only come to say that I cannot be here in the morning," replied Cavan.

"You are a bird of the night; but where are you going at this strange hour, though it is none of my business?" asked Mr. Westlawn.

"I am only going over to Excelsior," replied the agent, prudently keeping his business to himself.

"I believe that was the cry of the young fellow who was climbing a hill, but I never heard of a place of that name," commented Mr. Westlawn, as he led the way into his room, where he had lighted the gas.

"It is over on Lake Minnetonka."

"Lake Minnetonka!" exclaimed the guest.

"Is there anything strange about that, Westlawn?"

"My business is with a party of people who are at that lake, if I do not mistake the name," answered the guest, as he took a memorandum book from his coat, hanging on a hook.

"Lake Minnetonka is the great summer resort of the Minneapolitans; and even some from St. Paul have been known to go there," Cavan explained, as he looked at his watch.

"That is the place; I have the name here," replied the gentleman from Chicago. "But I want to see you as soon as possible. I have never given up that affair of eight years ago, about which you helped me; and I have obtained some new light on the subject," continued Mr. Westlawn, with no little anxiety in his expression. "Of course I know you are not in your former occupation, and I am only going to ask your advice as a friend."

"Of course I shall be glad to give you any advice in my power when I have time to hear the case," answered Cavan.

"I have learned that the sister of one of my birds has moved from New York to Minneapolis, and my party are here on a visit; and they have gone out to this lake to spend the summer. What is the reason I cannot go with you, for I shall have a chance to tell you all about it on the way, without taking up any more of your time?" suggested the guest.

The agent did not like to have two irons in the fire at the same time, and he looked at Phil, as though he expected him to say something about the matter.

"It will take nearly an hour to reach the Hermitage after we get to Excelsior," the captain remarked. "You can have the cabin all to yourselves for your conference."

"I have no objection to your going, Westlawn, but you must get ready in five minutes," said Cavan.

"I will be with you in three minutes," replied the guest, as he proceeded to dress himself more carefully than he had done before.

"I don't remember much about the case on which I worked for you, and I have not time to go back to my house to look up my note book in which I should find the whole of the details."

"No matter for that; I can tell you all about it," replied Westlawn, glancing at Phil, as though he understood that he must be careful what he said in the presence of a stranger.

He glanced at the captain of the Hebe, and then did more than that, for he fixed his gaze upon him, and suspended his operations, as though something about the young man had attracted his attention.

"You did not introduce your friend, Cavan," he added, turning to the agent.

"My name is Philip Greenway; or, at least, that is the name by which I am known at the lake; and I am the captain of the steamer Hebe, though it is no great thing of a steamer," interposed Phil, afraid that the agent would mention his real name.

"That is it, Captain Greenway," added Cavan. "But hurry up, or we shall lose the freight train on which we are to travel. If you don't like the accommodations, Westlawn, you must wait till seven in the morning for a passenger train."

"What is good enough for you is good enough for me, Cavan," said the guest, as he put on his coat. "It seems to me just as though I had seen this young man somewhere, though I can't tell where."

"He has lived in St. Paul for seven years at least, and very likely you have seen him there."

"That is not possible, since I never was here before in my life."

But it was time to go, and there was no time to say anything more; and in a few minutes they were in the caboose of the freight train on their way to their destination. There were several other persons in the car, and they had no opportunity to talk about the business of the gentleman from Chicago.

At three o'clock in the morning they arrived at Excelsior, and went on board of the Hebe. They were not expected by the engineer, and it took some minutes to wake him and induce him to unlock the door of the forward cabin.

"Get up steam just as quick as you possibly can, Bashy," said the captain, as soon as he got a sight of his faithful assistant, who was as much surprised at the appearance on board of the trio from St. Paul as though they had dropped down from the sky through the hurricane deck.

"What is up now, Captain Greenway?" stammered Bashy.

"No time for a word now! Get up steam, and then we can talk," said the captain, more sharply than he was accustomed to address the engineer.

Phil took the door of the after cabin, opened it and lighted the lamps, and the gentleman from Chicago admitted that no room in the Ryan could be better for their purpose.

In less than an hour, and while it was hardly daylight, the Hebe was off the Hermitage, neither of the burglars being in sight.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—THE FIRST OPERATION OF THE FLANK MOVEMENT.

MR. CAVAN and his friend from Chicago remained in the after cabin on the passage from Excelsior to Halsted's Bay, and it had not been decided what

should be done when the steamer arrived at her destination, for that was to depend upon the situation at the Hermitage.

When the Hebe was within a quarter of a mile of Cape Cod, Captain Greenway called through the speaking tube for the engineer to stop her, for he did not wish to disturb the intruders before the ex detective decided what should be done.

Leaving the pilot house, he went to the after cabin and knocked at the door, for the conference between the two gentlemen was held with closed doors, though there was no one on board to bother them.

Mr. Cavan answered the knock, and seemed to be greatly surprised when informed that the steamer had reached her destination, for he had evidently been as much interested in the affairs of his friend as he had been in those of the captain.

"All right, Paul——"

"Don't call me by that name, if you please," interposed Phil, in a whisper. "I am afraid I shall be discovered, for no one at the lake has the least idea who I am."

"Very well, Captain Greenway; I will not forget it again, and you shall not have occasion to complain of me for letting the cat out of the bag," replied the agent, with a laugh. "But I am not sure that it would not be better to tell Westlawn all about your history, though I have not said a single word to him yet."

"Tell him about my history!" exclaimed the captain, wondering what the shrewd ex detective could be thinking about. "I hope you will not do anything of the kind."

"I will not without your knowledge and consent," added Cavan, with an expression that puzzled Phil. "For the present we will confine our attention to these fellows in the shanty, though I have not seen anything of the surroundings and have not the least idea where we are."

"I told you that we are off Cape Cod, and the shanty is not more than a quarter of a mile from us," said the captain.

"Have you seen anything of the happy pair, as I heard you call them?" asked the agent.

For some reason which Phil could not comprehend, he seemed to be in excellent humor, and was even inclined to be mirthful, though he ought to have been sleepy and stupid after being up nearly the whole of the night.

"Everything is exactly as I left it last night."

"As the happy pair did not sleep any night before last, they will make a long snooze of it this morning, and they may not put in an appearance for hours yet," continued Cavan, as he came out of the cabin to the open space at the stern of the boat.

"The Hermitage is dead ahead of the steamer," said the captain pointing forward.

Mr. Westlawn followed his friend out of the cabin; but Cavan stopped him, and said he was working at his old profession, so that his operations must be conducted privately, though he seemed to be inclined to laugh all the time.

"Captain Greenway, my friend has not had much sleep tonight, any more

than the rest of us, and perhaps he had better turn in, if there is a berth for him," suggested the agent.

"There is a good berth in the forward cabin, and he can sleep there all day if he wishes," replied Phil, wondering what it was that amused his companion.

Mr. Westlawn liked the idea, and was shown to the forward cabin, where he inserted himself in the little berth, and was instructed by his friend not to show himself on deck without an invitation to do so.

"Now, Captain Greenway, we will see where we are," said Cavan, when the gentleman from Chicago had been disposed of.

"It is not so light as it will be in half an hour, but you can see the Hermitage," returned Phil.

"But I think we had better keep out of sight as much as possible."

"Then we will go into the pilot house. It is rather small quarters for two, but we can keep pretty comfortable there, and see all about us from the windows," continued the captain, as he led the way into the little box, where he placed the agent on one side of the wheel, while he stationed himself in his usual place on the other.

"That shanty on the point is the Hermitage, I suppose," said Cavan, as he looked through the window in front of him at the surroundings.

"That is the Hermitage; and the Hebe was moored last night in the bay beyond the cape," answered the captain, as he proceeded to point out the localities of the narrative he had given the agent.

"I don't believe those fellows have moved since they turned in last night," said Cavan, after he had considered the situation for a moment. "Now, where is the place did you say, that the two boats were hidden in the grove?"

"You can see the trees farther up the point from the shanty."

"As I find things here, I think our policy is to put things exactly as the fellows left them, and then wait for them to make the next move," said Cavan. "I should keep the steamer as far as possible from the shanty, and land the boats, even if we have to carry them some distance."

The captain called to the engineer through the tube, and told him to go ahead slowly, and not to blow off steam, or make any sound that could be heard at the shanty.

The Hebe went ahead again, and the pilot took her to a point as close to the shore as the depth of water would permit, and ran her fore foot on the sand, where the boats were restored to their former position under the bushes in the grove.

The party were obliged to wade out to the steamer, and it was awkward to be without a tender; but no one complained, and the steamer was shoved off from the sand.

"Now we are all right, and your engineer had better let his fires down, so that the smoke will not betray us in half an hour or an hour from now. We will circle round at a good distance from the point, and go to the moorings of the boat, where you had her last evening," continued Cavan, who seemed to have a plan in his head, though he had not yet explained it.

The captain and the agent returned to the pilot house, and the boat started again, Phil keeping her well off shore, as he had been directed.

"There is only one thing that I am afraid of which can betray what has been done since those fellows went to bed in the shanty," said Cavan, who wore a look of anxiety as he spoke.

"What is that, sir?" asked Phil, very desirous of avoiding any mishap.

"I am afraid Roddy, as you call him, will miss the money you took from his satchel; and that might change the entire current of affairs, though it might, at the same time, make him all the more anxious to undertake his next job, which you think is to be at the bank in the village."

"I concluded from what I heard that it was their objective point."

"I don't think there is anything else here to employ their talents, unless they go through some of these big hotels," said Cavan. "If Roddy should discover that his six thousand dollars were gone, he might possibly conclude that his movements were observed, or he is just as likely to believe that he had been robbed in his turn by one of his two companions."

"I don't think he is likely to discover his loss at present," said Phil. "Last night he looked into the bag, and when he found the package, which I had restored to its original appearance, he was satisfied, and did not open it."

"But he agreed to divide with Gay Sparkland, if that is what you call the nephew of our friend; and he may take out the money for this purpose," suggested Cavan.

"I don't believe he means to divide with Gay, for he has kept the money without giving any of it to either of his companions, and I believe he intends to skip at the right time without troubling himself about his associates, for he is the monkey that uses their cats' paws to pull his chestnuts out of the fire."

"Then he is the real villain of the party."

"When he is done with Gay and Chick Gilpool he will drop them both like a hot potato."

The Hebe reached her moorings, and was made fast to them.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"ONCE MORE THE FALL WITH EMPTY FIELDS AND SAD."

The year once more is verging to its close;
 The monitory wind all day long grieves;
 And from the hedge, like startled birds, the leaves
 Are scattered far on every gust that blows.
 The blithe birds are departed with the rose
 That bloomed but now along the cottage eaves—
 All save a few that 'mid the garnered sheaves
 In silence build against impending snows.
 Although beyond this gloom and dearth, you say,
 The spring shall come with song and flower and bee,
 And all these scenes forlorn again be glad,
 My soul keeps sighing this dark autumn day;
 The summer, too, must follow, and, ah me!
 Once more the fall with empty fields and sad!

Henry Jerome Stockard.

THE SANTY CLAUS TO MY WILL.

BY ROGERS PRESCOTT.

Being the recital of how a horse became a constant nightmare to a well meaning friend of a volunteer officer on sick leave—An expensive and last Christmas gift which probably saved an American soldier's life.

ALL my intimate friends know that I did not go to war with Spain during the last summer. It is for my mere acquaintances that I am thus forced into print to explain my haggard looks and my outspoken opposition towards the government or the present administration, or whatever officials had the say about our going to war over Cuba.

The war, or, rather, the results of the war are my first causes for complaint. If it hadn't been for that scrap with the Dons I would be just one thousand and fifteen dollars richer than I am today, I would weigh one hundred and seventy instead of one hundred and forty pounds, and I would be beginning to shop for Christmas presents, instead of thinking seriously of going to Turkey, where there is no such pretty myth as Santa Claus, to spend the holidays, and discover, if possible, some clever hair dye among the Musulmen with which to restore the locks about my whitening temples to their original shade of brown.

Two things rasp on my unstrung nerves worse than anything else; the first name of the patron saint of children, "Santy," and the sight of a horse. If I ever see or hear of that bay horse with a nicked off ear, who answers to the name of "Santy," I am going to do desperate murder, and the coroner's jury will acquit me as my readers will when they hear the plain, unvarnished tale which is appended to this preamble.

It all came to pass in this wise: When "the gaunt figure of war o'er-shadowed this fair country of ours," as the political orators have been saying this fall, my chum had a bad attack of the war fever. He was a private in one of the regiments which did not go and resigned to accept a commission in a fighting corps whose services to their States and country extend a little outside the confines of Creedmoor and Peekskill.

Well, Harrison Davis camped around in half a dozen places and drilled and drilled, and finally became captain. Then he went down to Florida, and for a change his regiment went into camp again. That is the nearest that my chum ever was to war.

About the middle of September he commenced to look badly, and the surgeon advised him to apply for a leave of absence and go up home to get a little change of air. Harry did as his superior ordered him (the surgeon held the rank of major), and came back to New York, looking a little worse than I do at the present moment.

We all knew what it meant when we saw the boy. By "we" I mean his

mother and father, and Alice and I. Mrs. and Mr. Davis immediately put Harrison to bed and sent for the doctor, and Alice broke down and I had to take her home, and on the way she told me in the strictest confidence how much she thought of Harry and what made her cry was the way he looked.

It wasn't typhoid, so the doctor said, nor it wasn't this kind of a fever or that. All the information that I could get from the medico was of a negative nature. I'm positive, however, that I know what ailed Harry. He had nothing less than common or garden horse fever. Perhaps that disease isn't known in the medical books, but that's what he had.

The first thing he said to me after he came up from the South was about that horse of his. He must have been out of his head at the time, for as soon as he had said: "Hello, Carter, old chap, how are you?" he began: "Say, you ought to see my horse. His name's 'Santy,' after the battle of Santiago, you know. I got him on the same day we heard of the victory. He's a fine looking bay. Not a blemish on him except a nick in his off ear."

Oh, visions of horses! Oh, nights replete with nightmares! How those words are indelibly branded upon my soul. "A bay with a nick in his off ear!" Can I ever forget them? "Never," the answer comes down through the future. What if I do go to Turkey. I can't erase the memory of that horse Santy, the most expensive and the last Christmas present I ever gave to a human being while I live.

Harrison wasn't so ill at first that he couldn't see Alice and me. I used to call at Miss Stafford's house every evening, and we would walk around to the Davises' and sit with Harrison for a while. To have Alice with him seemed to brace him up immensely. I had an idea that they had come to some sort of an understanding before Harry went away, but that didn't bother me in the least. Alice Stafford is a dear, sweet girl and will make just the wife for my chum, and I am not the least bit jealous.

But everything that he would talk about was that horse. He would count the days till he would be back in camp and could see Santy. I really think he forgot all about the honor and glory of wearing the government blue in the contemplation of seeing and riding that horse once more. And when his fever took a turn for the worse, and we all saw that Harry wouldn't be able to rejoin his regiment for many long months and possibly never—yes, the poor boy was awfully sick for a time—he talked of nothing but Santy in his delirium.

I never thought a person could love a brute as Harrison Davis cared for his horse. He wouldn't take nourishment until the nurse had told him that Santy had been fed. Every night when the nurses changed they couldn't quiet the lad until they had assured him that his horse had been bedded down and given plenty of "shorts," or whatever is the evening equine diet.

If I'd been Alice Stafford I would have been a little put out that Harry's only thought was for a horse instead of me. Still, she's an awfully sensible girl, and didn't for a moment cease her attentions. She called at the Davises' twice a day, and she didn't make any bones about crying when Mrs. Davis would tell her that Harrison wasn't doing as well as might be expected.

It was about this time, when Harry was so dreadfully low, that his regi-

ment was ordered home and mustered out. I must have heard of it at the time, but my every thought was on my chum, and the fact must have slipped my mind. It was only when the climax of the fever was passed and we were able to take a long breath that we turned our minds to outside things. Then it was that we learned of the disbandment of Harry's regiment.

The first day that he saw Alice and me the doctor told him that the boys of his company sent their love to their captain.

The poor lad was so weak that he could not raise his head as he whispered :

"When did you hear from them?"

"Why, Harry," the M. D. continued, "they're all home and mustered out long ago."

I have just said that the fellow was too weak to move his head, but it took his father and me to hold him in bed as he struggled to get up.

"Where's Santy? Where's my Santy?" he gasped.

Heavens! None of us had the least idea, but the doctor was a man of resources. He stood behind the sick lad, and he held up his finger to us as a sign of warning. Then he turned to Harry.

"Your horse Santy is all right, Harry. We bought him at auction when the horses of your regiment were disposed of, and he is waiting for you to get well and exercise him in the Park."

It was a lie, pure and simple, on the doctor's part, but then it had the desired effect on the patient. Harrison sighed as if a great load had been lifted from his mind, sank back on the pillow and soon fell asleep. But that lie rebounded upon innocent me, and its curse has left me in this frightful condition, which frightens my friends and puzzles my acquaintances. My troubles date from that moment.

When we had all left the room I turned to the physician.

"Dr. Short," I said, "why did you tell the boy that we have his horse? I haven't the faintest idea where the beast is. Have you?"

Short smiled as if he knew what was in store for me in the future.

"Nor have I, Mr. Knowlton."

"Then why in the world did you tell him something that wasn't so?"

"Simply to save our patient, my dear sir; that's all. Not for the sake of lying, let me assure you. Harry is in that condition when the slightest cloud on his mental horizon would mean a relapse and—I—don't dare say what. If I had just told him the bare truth, that we have no idea as to the whereabouts of his horse, he would never have survived the news. His mind has rested constantly on that horse, why, I cannot say. You know fever patients always have queer hallucinations, and Harrison's mind has settled on the horse he rode in service. So to satisfy him I told him a lie. You don't condemn me for that, do you?"

"Why, not a bit. Only what are we going to do when the boy gets better and wants to see this plaguy horse?"

The doctor looked calmly at me and answered :

"Find him."

"Find him?" I yelled so that the nurse turned and said, "Shu-u." I choked my wrath and went on : "Why, my dear doctor, how do you suppose

I am going to find a horse that has been sold a week ago at public auction in a great city like this? In the first place I don't even know where the beast was sold."

"But you can find out."

I went down stairs with Alice Stafford. She always had ideas when one was in a tight fix, and I wanted to consult her.

"I know what I'll do," she replied to my exposition of the whole case. "I'll ask Tom Jackson about the horse. He's in the business, in a way, you know. He has a stock farm up in the Berkshires, and when he comes to town he'll be just the one to consult."

For once I was disappointed in Alice. Her ready answer to a problem did not please me a bit on this occasion. I didn't want to bring Tom Jackson into this game at all. I knew that he used to be "soft" on Alice, and his appearance upon the scene might hurt Harry's chances with her in some way.

I told part of this to Miss Stafford, but she only laughed and answered:

"Why, Tom and I are the best of friends, and he'd do anything for me. Now, don't be foolish, Carter. You know I want to get that horse for Harry, even if I dig up old scores to do it. There'll be no damage done, believe me."

I had to give in, she looked so sweet and fetching, but I wish I hadn't now, for the entrance of that man Jackson upon our little stage of events easily put fifty extra gray hairs in both of my side locks, to say nothing—but then, that's part of my story.

I didn't sit down and wait, however, while this man Jackson was coming post haste down from the Berkshires in answer to Alice Stafford's letter. That very day I set about looking for that horse.

I called up a newspaper man I knew on the telephone, and asked him if he could tell me where the horses of the officers of the volunteer infantry regiments had been sold at auction. He gave me the names of a couple of sales and exchange stables, and I visited both of them.

Yes, both had sold government horses. One of them had sold all the officers' horses of Harry's regiment. But at the same time this firm had auctioned off five hundred others, and how could I tell who had bought my chum's horse, with only this data at hand with which to identify him: "A bay with a nick in his off ear?"

The proprietor of the horse exchange was perfectly willing to give me the names of the persons to whom he had sold the batch of horses, but when I saw the list of two or three hundred names, the enormity of the task seemed too much for me. However, the welfare of my dear friend depended upon the finding of his horse; so I took up my heavy burden and started out to visit every stable in New York, it seemed to me. Then I went out on Long Island and inquired of every German truck gardener who had bought government horses if they possessed a "bay with his off ear nicked."

All this traveling around was taking a terrible amount of time. My office was coming to have only a nodding acquaintance with me, and my clients' cases were being shockingly neglected. Yet I couldn't give up the search.

It was really pitiful to go and see Harry and lie to him as I was forced to do.

Every day about eleven o'clock in the morning I was allowed to pay him a visit and tell him how Santy was getting on. I don't know how I ever escaped being found out, but this is a sample of our conversation, which took place every morning. I would enter Harry's room, and the first word he would say would be:

"Oh, Carter, did you give Santy that apple I gave you yesterday?"

"Indeed I did, Harry," I would reply, "and do you know when he put his velvet white nose into my hand, he seemed to be thanking me for bringing him a remembrance of you." Then I'd sit back and pat myself for telling such a beautiful tale.

But Harry would get up on his elbow and his face would cloud.

"White nose, Carter? Why, Santy hasn't a white nose."

"Certainly not," I would reply hurriedly, "of course not—I mean his lovely—black snout—er—what? Yes, how foolish of me not to notice it. His fine, soft, red nose would rub along my sleeve, and then he'd whinny—what? Santy never whinnied? Well, he does now. It's a trick the stable boys have taught him."

And so I'd go on, with the goose flesh just standing out all over me, for fear Harry would discover the falseness of everything we were telling him about that horse of his.

What I didn't know about that blessed Santy would fill a public library; still I had to keep on bluffing to my chum. When I wasn't telling him some fairy tale, I would be chasing every government horse that had gone under the hammer for the last month. Not one of them corresponded with the description of the animal given to me daily by the convalescent Harrison Davis.

He was sitting up now, and the doctor told me one night that in a week my chum could go out for a drive, "Just to look at Santy, you know," and that fiend of a doctor nudged me in the ribs and laughed uproariously.

I pleaded with him to keep the boy in until I had found the horse, and he said that he'd try to, but Harrison knew that he was getting well, and it would be almost as bad to make him fret himself ill again by not going out into the air, as it would be for him to go out and not find the horse.

Three more days passed, and still no horse. I had taken to advertising for a "bay horse with a nicked off ear lately used by the government in volunteer infantry service," and I gave the name of Harry's regiment.

I received answers from the owners of the original horse that Noah brought out of the Ark, and every generation of equine descent since. But none of them was the beast I was looking for.

"Two days more," said the doctor, "and Harry will be able to take that drive and look at Santy."

My hair began to grow white. I could feel the color going. My nerves gave out completely, and only the thought of my dear old mother kept me from drink or suicide.

Then momentary relief came in the person of that man, Tom Jackson. On the day before Harrison Davis would discover that we had no such horse as Santy waiting for him, I went in despair to Alice Stafford. At her house I met Jackson.

Just as the desperate gambler bets his last white chip on a pair of twos, so did I put all my hopes on that man. I knew I was asking the enemy a favor, but I thought that even hostilities to the death would be called off in such straits as we were in.

But I should have recognized the old familiar melodramatic gleam in the villain's eye as he smiled sardonically. I should have known that we were in his power, and that he would go to any extremes to make the man who had cut him out uncomfortable.

I had grown insane about the finding of Santy, however, and saw nothing but hope in the polite proffers of that fiend, Jackson. But as soon as I left Miss Stafford's house my own mind returned, and I commenced to suspect the polished ways of that dark eyed former wooer of the girl my chum loved. I entered the hansom which had been waiting for me and drove around the corner. Then I told the driver to stop, while I got out and peeked around a fence, to see what Jackson was going to do.

He came out of the Staffords' and drove away in a sporty looking tilbury.

I knew the driver of the hansom I had hired. He had been my Jehu and my chief adviser in the long search for Santy. He was foxy and, furthermore, most obliging. So I pointed to the retreating wagon and ordered him to follow it. It went over on the west side of town and finally drew up in front of the very exchange stable where the batch of government horses had been sold with Santy among their number.

Immediately I assumed another rôle. I was now a detective on the trail of a sly scoundrel, who knew all the facts in our part of the game and was going to kill Harrison Davis under the pretense of being a friend. I say "kill" with due forethought.

This was how I worked out the scheme of Jackson's treachery. He, being a horse dealer, could find out from his friend, the auctioneer, where Santy was. He would buy the beast and take him away. Then, on the next day, when Harry would be allowed to go out, there would be no horse for him to see, and, as the doctor said, the poor boy would have a relapse brought on by disappointment. If the doctor wouldn't let him go out, then the lad would be just as disappointed.

Alice and I had told all these things to Jackson, and he knew all our plans, and would act accordingly. I firmly believe that he wanted Harrison Davis to die, and leave a clear field for him in the affections of Alice Stafford once more.

I never posed as a hero in my life, but as I put the period to this line of thought, I said to myself: "Carter Knowlton, you've got to act a star part for once in your life. It rests with you to frustrate the machinations of the villain in this little tragedy. You must get that horse before Jackson does."

As Jackson's tilbury disappeared in the entrance of the horse exchange I jumped out of the two wheeler and entered the office. The proprietor left it as I came in, and did not see me as he went out by the door that led into the tanbark auction ring.

"Hello, Tom," I heard him say to Jackson, "when did you get in town?"

"I arrived this morning, and I want to ask you one thing. Have you got

a bay horse in the stable that was auctioned off by the government? He answers to the name of Santy, and has a nick in his off ear."

The auction man roared.

"Say, have you got that habit, too? There's been a young fellow in here every day for two months about that horse. I just got the animal again this morning in a batch that's been sent here to be sold at auction, and I was going to send this fellow Knowlton word that I had him."

Jackson grasped the man by his arm.

"Don't you do it. I'll give you fifty dollars now for the horse."

"I'd like to accommodate you, Tom, but this is a dead straight auction, and the horse'll have to go under the hammer."

Jackson scowled like the villain he was.

"Confound you," he exclaimed in an ugly tone, "I'll give you seventy five, eighty, one hundred."

The proprietor laughed.

"Say, Tom, don't bid against yourself. Wait until four this afternoon, and you can get him for a song. But tell me, what's the great attraction about the beast, eh?"

Tom Jackson only shrugged his shoulders and started for the office. I slunk back into a corner near the window, and he went to the telephone. I jumped visibly when he called up the number of my office. No, I wasn't there. Then he called up the Davises. No, I wasn't there, either.

At last he asked for the number of the Staffords' telephone, and he smiled when he received an answer.

"Is that you, Miss Stafford. Yes, this is Jackson. I wanted to ask you if Mr. Knowlton is there? No? Well, I've some good news for you. The horse is at last found."

I melted. I had been thinking that Jackson was a rogue, and here he was coming out and showing himself a true man. He was telling all about the horse, and trying to find out where I was, that I might come up here and bid the beast in during the auction that afternoon.

But wait, what's that he's saying? I listen again.

"Well, if you find him before three tell him that the horse is to be sold at auction over in Long Island City at a sales stable on the corner of High and Gleason Streets, this afternoon at four o'clock."

Ha! I saw the utter villainy of the wretch. He wanted to get me over in Long Island, in some out of the way hole, while he was buying Santy and killing Harry Davis, and putting himself in his old position in the graces of Alice Stafford. But I happened to be a little too smart for the crafty rogue. I would appear at that auction, and I would buy Santy if it cost a million, and I would save my chum's life.

Jackson put up the receiver of the telephone and rang off. I tried my best to get out of the office without his seeing me. I went through the door which led into the ring, and was sneaking behind an incoming team when the proprietor spied me.

"Hello, there, Knowlton. I was just talking about you. Say, what's your hurry? I've got your horse for you."

I suppose the business instinct of the man came before his friendship for Jackson, and he saw in the desire of two persons for the one horse a lively bit of betting and a consequent large percent of commission for himself.

At that moment Jackson emerged from the office. He had heard my name called out and annoyance was visibly portrayed on his face. But he shook hands with me with forced cordiality, exclaiming:

"By Jove, I've been 'phoning for you all over. The horse is here. What say you to that? We've got him, and—say, he won't be sold until four. Come and have some lunch with me."

The man was an enigma to me. One moment I was sure he was a villain and the next I was almost convinced that he was a friend to Harrison Davis and myself. However, I couldn't do anything to offend him now. I would accept his invitation to luncheon, and that would give me time to think out the plan of campaign.

"Why, yes, thanks. I will take lunch with you. How fortunate to find the animal, wasn't it? Oh, by the way, I want to speak to my cabby." I turned to the honest Jehu. "Be here at four, will you?" I wished to take the news of my success to Alice as soon as I had bought the horse.

Then we went across the street to a hotel, and Jackson asked me to lunch in his private room. He always had a suite of apartments there, he explained, because he was coming down to town to sell or buy horses continually.

I only feared one thing: that he might try to get me under the influence of liquor. I promised myself not to touch a drop, and to keep my eyes on Jackson.

The lunch was great. Every delicacy of the season was set before us, and my host was most attentive. It was really hard for me to believe that that genial looking chap across the table might be trying to kill my chum by indirect methods.

Jackson never forced me to drink. He only said: "Pardon me," when I told him I didn't care for any. About half past three we had almost finished our cigars and coffee, and I was about to suggest that we go over to the auction, when the room telephone rang, and Jackson got up and answered it.

He turned to me in a moment and said:

"Will you excuse me, Mr. Knowlton, for a moment. I'll be right back."

Suspicion came into my heart, and I looked at my watch.

"Why, I think I'll be going over to the stable. It's almost time for the sale to start now," I replied.

"That's just what I wanted to see about. The proprietor has just telephoned me that the auctioneer can't come until five, and the sale will be delayed until then. Excuse me if I step to the wire and find out the particulars."

"No, sir," I answered boldly. "Tom Jackson, you can't fool me. I know you want that horse, and you won't get him without a fight with me."

I would have said more if I hadn't suddenly received a fierce push, and found myself flat on the floor, with the door closed and the lock sprung.

For a moment I was stunned. Then the truth came to me in a torrent.

Jackson had enticed me over here. He had locked me in his rooms. He was now on his way to the sale of Santy, where he would buy the beast with-

out the least opposition. Then when it was all over, and too late for me to prevent it, I would be let out.

I am not the kind to give up, though. I had gone too far in the search for that horse to surrender when he was almost within my sight. There was some way of getting out of that room, and I was going to get out.

I looked out of the window and across the street to the exchange stable. The crowd of horsemen had already collected, and I could see the horses being trotted up and down the ring. My watch registered two minutes before four o'clock.

Now for my escape. I spring to the push button that connects with the bell in the office. I ring and ring it again. No one comes up. There's the telephone to the office. I work the thing until I break it. Then I yell and kick against the door.

That villain Jackson led me into his own country, where everybody is his friend. He has probably told the clerk that I am intoxicated and not to mind me in the least.

Once more I rush to the window, and much as I dislike the generality of cab drivers, I never saw a fairer sight than my cabby presented as he sat on his hansom waiting for me, as I had ordered him to do.

"Hey, Hogan," I shouted at the top of my voice.

He looked up in surprise to see me there.

"Get a policeman and force your way up here. I'm a prisoner and can't get out."

The utter ridiculousness of my position must have impressed the cabman, but he immediately whipped up his horse and disappeared around the block, only to return in a moment with a minion of the law as a fare. I called to them, and they both entered the hotel.

I heard a lot of talking down the hall, and presently many footsteps approached the room where I was incarcerated. A key was inserted in the door, the latter swung back, and I was a free man once more.

I did not even stop to thank the cop. I grabbed my cabby by the arm and fled the place. We didn't wait for the elevator, but rushed down two flights of stairs.

On the way I gasped out my predicament to my faithful driver, and he told me how he happened to strike an old pal of his on this beat, "Con" Kelly, the copper.

"He'll stand for anything I give him, an' he's all right, he is."

I have a vague recollection of saying that I would use my influence to have Mr. Kelly promoted to a roundsmanship, when we rushed into the tanbark auction ring.

There, in the middle of a group of men, stood the worst looking specimen of horseflesh that ever escaped being cut up for crowbait. It was a bay horse, and as I yelled, "Santy," its off ear came forward, and I saw that it was nicked.

Hogan, the cabby, saved me again. He put up his hand just as the auctioneer's hammer was coming down on the "gone," and the bidding commenced again. I had my breath now, and my driver shoved me to the front of that circle of men.

The first person I spied was Tom Jackson, mad as a March hare, and shouting an advance of ten dollars on my bid.

Then began a battle royal for the possession of that horse. In all his wild dreams the proprietor of that exchange never realized such ideal auctioneering as this was. He must have hugged himself that he had let two persons know that the "bay with a nicked ear" was to be sold on that day.

There stood that beast that was not worth five dollars, in the center of an excited circle of spectators, with his ears forward and head down between his legs.

Every other bidder except Jackson and myself had dropped out long before the price had entered the twenties. Now he and I were ascending the ladder ten dollars at a time.

"Four hundred and twenty, four thirty, forty, fifty"—the auctioneer's arm would swing like the pendulum of a clock between Jackson and me. Five, six hundred had been passed, and I glanced around for Hogan. He was gone. I forgot all about his absence in a bit of especially lively bidding that happened then.

We had boosted the price of that old boneyard up to one thousand and fifteen dollars, when I noticed a disturbance on the other side of the crowd. I saw the cause in a minute. Hogan was pushing his way into the ring about Santy, and following him was officer "Con" Kelly, my rescuer from imprisonment in Jackson's rooms.

"There's your man, officer!" Hogan's voice squeaked with excitement. "He's the man I swore out a warrant for. Pull him in!"

Jackson turned as a white cotton gloved hand landed none too gently on his collar, and Kelly said:

"Come with me, young feller."

The auctioneer kept right on.

"One thousand and fifteen, fifteen, fifteen. Once, twice; going, going, gone, to that gentleman over there with his hat off."

I rushed in and put my hand on Santy's head and called the beast by name. He swished his tail and nodded his head, and then relapsed into his former semicomatose state as if he didn't in the least realize that he had cost me about two hundred times what he was really worth.

My cabby brought me to my senses again.

"Say, Mr. Knowlton, does yer want to force de charge aga'n the lobster what locked yer in his room?"

I thought not. I went into the office of the stable with the policeman, the cab driver, and my enemy, Jackson.

"Jackson," said I, when the door was closed, "you thought that you were a very foxy person, didn't you? But you've got to be born and brought up in New York to beat a New Yorker. My friends here, Hogan and Officer Kelly, have saved me from losing that horse and endangering the life of Mr. Harrison Davis.

"Now, I don't care to get you into the public print, on account of your past friendship with Miss Stafford, so I will go to the station in Mr. Hogan's cab with you and get you discharged. Then Officer Kelly will give you just

time enough to pack your luggage and take the train back to your Berkshire home at the earliest possible moment."

* * * * *

The next day was a warm one in the late fall, and my old friend Hogan called for me with his two wheeler about eleven in the morning.

As I told him to take me around to the Davises', he remarked:

"Say, Mr. Knowlton, dat Santy's all right now. He's in der stable where I keep my rig, and you wouldn't know him wid the rubbin' an' feedin' I give him."

When Harry was led gently down the front stoop and lifted into the harness, I said to Hogan with a wink:

"Driver, take us to Mr. Hogan's stable, where that horse I was telling you about is," and Hogan winked back at me and snapped his whip.

The forlorn looking Santy was led out upon the street, and up to our cab, where Harry could reach out and pat him on the head. And Santy just swished his tail and looked more stupid than ever, but Harry assured me that his faithful animal recognized him completely.

I stopped to speak to my friend Hogan the other evening, and told him that Santy has been turned out on Mr. Davis' New Jersey farm, but I made my faithful ally in the never to be forgotten search for the beast promise me one thing: That, if I should die before he did, he would see to it that one clause in my will was carried out to the letter. Santy should be led out and shot at sunrise over my grave the day after I was buried. I added that that performance might in some way compensate me for the agony that I went through in making my dear old Harry a somewhat previous, but, notwithstanding, a most expensive, Christmas present.

CAN I FORGET?

CAN I forget? The moon was forest high,
 And made a golden path above the trees;
 We sat us down, and there was no sound nigh
 Except the breeze.
 And so we bode in silence, inly yearning;
 For neither knew nor dared love's knowledge yet;
 But ever unto thine my face was turning—
 Can I forget?

Can I forget? Ah, love, 'twas but a word
 About some trivial thing that broke the spell;
 But what thou saidst, sweetheart, and what I heard,
 I may not tell.
 I only know that on my bosom sinking,
 I feel that sudden, fragrant burden yet,
 And of thy lips my lips are madly drinking—
 Can I forget?

A FAIR SLAVE TO THE MAHDI.*

BY CHARLES EDWARD BARNES.

A tale of strange happenings in the Soudan—The "angel of light" who came in mysterious fashion to the Mahdi's camp at Khartoum, and the thrilling adventures that befell her in the strife for freedom.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

TOM STANSLAUS, a rich young New Yorker, has put his yacht, the Ariel, at the service of a scientific expedition, whose idea is to land in Africa and penetrate by balloon into the unknown Dar Banda region.

A few days out from New York a stowaway is discovered on board who proves to be Stanlaus' sister, Dorothy.

The exploring expedition reaches the head waters of the Aruwimi and the balloon is launched. Dorothy Stanlaus becomes entangled in the ropes and in the ascension is carried up with the balloon. A landing is made in order that Dorothy may be restored to her brother. The four scientists are killed by the natives in the undertaking, and the girl is left in the anchored balloon which is in turn attacked by the savages.

Dorothy escapes from the savages in the balloon, which lands her in the country of the false prophet, El Mahdi, who makes her his favorite slave.

Among the prisoners captured by the Mahdi at the fall of Khartoum is the Russian consul, Prince Andrea Bardoff. He communicates with Dorothy Stanlaus and plots to free her from her bondage. His disguise is penetrated, however, and he is sentenced to be executed.

Bardoff bribes his way to freedom. Dorothy is about to be made a wife of the Mahdi when a Greek slave girl rescues her by poisoning the false prophet. This enables the American to escape through the underground passage to the mosque square where she meets the prince. After keeping in hiding for some days, they capture the yacht Aldeen by a ruse and run the gauntlet of the dervish river batteries and gunboats until the boat is wrecked in the cataracts. After various adventures Bardoff manages to procure a camel with a native for guide, and they make some further progress northwards. But presently they realize that pursuers are on their track and that the native guide is only awaiting a chance to make off with their gold.

The former are eluded, however, and the treacherous native falls a victim to the jaws of a crocodile. The fugitives plod on and after eight days of torturing heat sight the mountains. Then they blunder into a dervish camp at midnight.

Bardoff tells a tale about being bound on a mission to Suakim with a message to Osman Digna, whereupon the emir sends to Berber to obtain confirmation of his statement and holds the two captive meanwhile.

CHAPTER XXX.—THE FLIGHT ONWARD.

ALL that day, though well fed and comfortably sheltered from the burning sun, the refugees were detained at the decree of the emir. Along toward night the prince began to get restive under the chafing bonds.

"Comrade," he said, "we must get out of this tonight, even if we are compelled to go on foot across this mighty stretch of wilderness to the sea. To remain here another day means that messengers may arrive from Berber, and all will be lost. It is plain that the emir does not intend to stir from here till such tidings overtake him. What say you?"

**This story began in the June issue of THE ARGOSY. The six back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 60 cents.*

"I am ready for anything now," said Dorothy, whom rest and good food had revived. "Lead and I shall follow."

"God bless you!" murmured the prince heartily.

The day was lowering and dismal, a sirocco blowing southwest into a rising gale. Darkness came early; and when the refugees' supper was brought by one of the emir's servants, Bardoff bribed the fellow to obtain enough rations from the commissary department under cover of darkness to last the pair for a week.

About midnight the prince led his precious charge through the sleeping camp. They avoided the guards, and hurried on to the camel ground.

Bardoff deposited the little kit of provisions under a tree, and left Dorothy on guard. Then he crept up and stole a filled water skin from one of the camels, and kicked to its feet the best looking beast in the herd.

Though the camel made the usual protest, and started some of the others groaning, the rising wind bore the sound away from the sleeping camp.

At the very last moment, when the feat seemed accomplished, the prince was confronted by a camel boy, who was staring through the gloom in silence upon this startling capture, too amazed at its very daring to raise a cry of protest.

Bardoff approached him, drew his sword with one hand, and plunged the other into his precious treasure of English sovereigns. He drew forth two shining coins and gave the astonished fellow his choice between death and a small fortune.

After some trembling hesitation, the lad clutched the gold greedily.

"Mind you," whispered the prince, "not a word—not a sound. Tell them that the camel broke loose—anything you wish; but be true to your oath, or by el Muntazar!"

"Never fear," answered the camel driver. He kissed his doubtful benefactor's hands, and then was lost in the darkness, to resume his slumbers with his treasure snugly pocketed over his heart.

Soon the campfires of the enemy were far behind them. The rising wind blew up a mighty cloud of sand between the refugees and the emir's camp, like a wall of safety, as they started forward at a rapid pace. The beast had enjoyed perfect rest, and had been well fed and watered. The high wind was directly behind them, so Bardoff urged the camel into a striding trot.

On over the bleak steppes and the silent plain, through deep ravines, bursting out over khors edged with underbrush, the little caravan hurried on toward the far haven of safety.

"They will be upon us very soon," said Bardoff, as the day dawned, "for the emir's rage will be boundless when he discovers our flight. He will have the pick of camels, and can travel fast. Our only hope is that our own beast will stand the awful march. We have at least five hours the start."

"It seems a good deal," said Dorothy.

"That remains to be seen," mused Bardoff none too encouragingly. "Come; let us hurry on." And he whipped up the camel again.

The beast had not trotted a mile further, however, when he began to show signs of great fatigue. Bardoff saw these symptoms, and it filled him with

terror. A species of blind staggers was attacking the animal; and so unsteady was his trot that Dorothy was thrown headlong into the sand. Then the beast broke loose, and ran like mad down a slight declivity, bellowing and shaking his head, struggling from side to side until he fell in a heap and lay quivering. Bardoff was in despair. He helped Dorothy to her feet. "What is to be done now?" she gasped.

"God alone knows," whispered Bardoff, somewhat cheered to see his comrade revive; then he led her down the declivity to where there was a clump of tall reeds which might suffice for a momentary hiding place.

They found the camel stone dead, with the provisions and waterbag crushed beneath him. In Dorothy's fall from the saddle she had carried the load around, so that the precious kit slipped under him; and when he fell in a heap, the waterbag burst, and the provisions were all but ruined.

It took no little courage to get what little remained to them into shape. Dorothy bound them on Bardoff's back. Then he took her hand, and they began to struggle on afoot over the bleak trail.

Every little while Bardoff would glance back, but saw nothing. He was busily encouraging Dorothy after this, and did not look back for a long time. When he did finally a most appalling sight was presented to him. Two mounted men were closing down upon them from the westward. They were the pursuers sent by the emir, and were coming on at a frightful pace, their gibbehs flapping in the wind and their heads bent low to avoid the dust.

Bardoff seized Dorothy by the hand, and made a quick dash into a low clump of reeds. Here they both fell flat on their faces.

If the men had held their heads erect matters might have been very serious for the refugees. As it was, they waited in breathless silence till the pair flew by. Then the prince threw down his kit and unsheathed his sword whispering, "Wait here for me," and was off like a meteor, throwing aside his gibbeh as he ran.

On he sped through the clouds of flying sand, until he was lost to view in a small ravine half a mile distant.

Dorothy sank upon the warm sand. She knew what it meant—a last fight for life and liberty, and there were two to one.

In the mean time Bardoff awaited his opportunity. As the camels slacked their pace through the ravine he hamstringed the rear camel, so that he came down with a crash, his rider almost beneath him. There was a single clash of weapons, followed by a cry which broke into a long, low moan.

Like a panther the prince sprang after the forward camel. The astonished rider turned just in time to see his adversary. Instead of slashing his camel with his burbash, and so gaining time to draw his weapon, the stampeded dervish reined him in. He seized his spear, and hurled it wide of the mark.

A revolver was his next defense, but before he could use it there came a mighty lunge from behind. The fellow threw back his shoulders, uttered a queer scream, and fell forward over the camel's neck, dead.

It was a very difficult task for Bardoff to hold the camel and dig a sand grave for two men at the same time. But when all was done, the reluctant beast was headed back against the driving storm.

Half way to the point of refuge the prince met Dorothy, who had been made nearly insane by the suspense and terrors of the rising simoom. She almost fell into his arms, and sobbed hysterically: "I thought you were dead. I should have gone mad if I had been compelled to stay there alone another moment. The uncertainty was terrible. Tell me what has happened? There is blood——"

"Never mind!" cried Bardoff, taking the pack, which was crushing her to earth. "We are not done for yet. There is still hope that we may escape. I have just accomplished a grand coup," and he told her what had happened.

In a few minutes the camel was loaded with their own provisions and such of the dervishes' as they might have use for; and then they hurried on before the increasing sand storm, resolving to keep up the run as far as possible before seeking shelter.

Suddenly Bardoff gave a low whistle of surprise as he slowed up somewhat and began to inspect some fresh camel tracks in the trail, which were now blown over lightly by the sand drifts. "It is as I suspected," he said. "We have come upon the messengers whom the emir sent on to Osman Digna."

"Are they near?" asked Dorothy, choking with the dust.

"They cannot be more than a mile ahead."

"Then let us stop here, and let them get farther ahead. This is no time nor place for an encounter."

"On the contrary, comrade," said the prince, giving the camel a cut that made her spring forward, "it is the very best time and place possible. They will be off their guard. It will be so unexpected——" He paused, for his eyes were upon the clean cut footprints. "Ha! they have gone into ambush to lie down till the sand storm is passed. Wait here for me. I will reconnoiter. Don't fear," he said encouragingly. "Stay on the trail, and I shall surely find you again. These scoundrels must never reach Osman Digna, or we shall never reach Suakim; that's certain; so keep up heart. I shall not be long, I promise you. No one will trouble you in this storm. We have come too fast to be run down, and the storm is too hard to face. You have nothing to fear."

Bardoff had not gone fifty yards when he came upon two camels bound together, their noses thrust almost under their forelegs, and beyond them were two shapes sprawled out in the drifting sand, covered with blankets and evidently asleep.

With one hand clutching his sword, with the other the prince threw back the covering of the larger of the two men, exposing as he did so a warrior of the Amarat tribe, from whose straw girdle there hung a pouch of snake skin bound with the scarlet flag of the emir, Mamud el Fiki. Here then was the coveted prize.

Cutting it loose while the man slept like the dead, Bardoff turned away and drew forth the message to Osman Digna; with its big seals and pompous flourishes, thankful that he could escape without shedding more blood. Then he stole back to the two camels and kicked them upon their feet.

Three minutes later, with the three camels and ample provisions now to their credit, the fugitives renewed their flight over the white trail at double speed. They kept steadily on mile after mile and hour after hour until it was very nearly nightfall, when, to their great gratification, the sand storm subsided, and they entered the bleak ravines and dreary passes of the Kohreb Mountains.

With the dying light of day, the two paused and looked back upon the awful plain.

"If those two sheiks do not find a surprise when they wake, I cannot prophesy," said Bardoff at last.

"Then—then you did not feel compelled——" Dorothy paused, but the prince understood her.

"No; I never take life unless in self defense. The tired sheiks slept like stone. I even cut the girdle from one of them, and found this message to the commander of the forces of the east. Let us hear what the emir has to say to his superior."

Seating himself on a sand mound the prince unfolded the document with care, translating as he read:

"In the name of Allah, the merciful and compassionate, and the Faith of Islam. Amen!

"From the servant of his Lord, the Mahdi—the emir Mamud el Fiki, midway between the Nile and the Red Sea, to the commander of the Arsar in the East, Defender of Madien, Osman Digna. The greetings of a servant to his master. God be with thee!

"Know that there arrived in camp this night a man who proclaims himself one of the bodyguard of the holy Imam, the Mahdi, from Omdurman. He claims to bear tidings to thee, O, Osman the Blest, from the Khalifa Abdulla, to the effect that the Great Mahdi is dead, and that the Khalifa Abdulla has been appointed his successor. The guard has with him a white slave captured from Khartoum, which he claims that the Khalifat sent thee as a present and token of esteem.

"Noble commander, I fear that what he tells is the truth—that our glorious Imam is removed—but I wait here for messengers to bear me the confirming tidings from Berber, upon receiving which I shall send the messengers on to thee. In the mean time I shall hold the alleged 'guard of the Mahdi,' whom I strongly suspect of being a European infidel escaping from Omdurman in the disguise of a Baggara warrior, in which case, put no trust in these rumors. I fear, however, that what he speaks is the truth, for he could never have escaped hither with a slave of the Imam, the Master, without doing so while the excitement of such a great calamity was filling every mind. He is a crafty scoundrel, and I fear to allow him to proceed. I shall, therefore, hold him prisoner till I have tidings confirming or refuting his intelligence.

"Noble commander, we pray the most high God, to whom be praise, to bring us soon to thy reinforcement that the siege of Suakin may be an accomplished fact, to the glory of Allah and the increased dominion of the Mahdi. 'Allah yebarek!' 'God be with thee!'

"Dated, 8 Sha'abam, 1302.

(Signed) MAMUD EL FIKI.

"Postscript.—The white slave of the Mahdi is young and very beautiful."

A short, ringing laugh—the very first that had cheered poor Bardoff for many dark days—greeted the closing words of the grave message to the commander of the eastern forces.

"I must indeed have looked beautiful," said Dorothy, "after the frightful days and days of toil through the desert, pallid with terror and apprehension as we came into the presence of the emir. I wonder that he was so favorably impressed."

The prince gave her a glance. Could it be that even the barbarian savage could look through that cloud of dust and those lines of suffering and see what a beautiful soul lay within, even as he himself had seen day by day on this

solemn journey? Perhaps. "Thank God! he will never see her again," the prince murmured as he turned away to feed the camels with dhurra moistened with water.

CHAPTER XXXI.—PRISONERS OF WAR.

ON they started again, after this respite, plodding over the dismal heights of the mountains, through awful ravines and over monstrous crags, Dorothy again falling asleep in her saddle. Tenderly Bardoff tied her safely in her high perch for the rest of the bitter march, and so plodded wearily on till day-break.

With the gray of dawn they had reached the highest point of the range, commanding a view of the more diverse country, stretching far to the Red Sea, some fifty miles away. Finding a safe refuge, for the mountains were known to be infested with robbers, the two ate their simple breakfast with gusto; then leaving their camel to rest in the ambush, they climbed a crag to gain a view of the prospect before them.

A most astonishing panorama was spread out to their view—a wild and ragged landscape, enlivened here and there by winding ridges of low trees and shrubbery. The glad sight moved their hearts as nothing had since their hour of deliverance at Omdurman.

"See!" cried Dorothy, leaping upon a boulder and making binoculars of her two brown hands. "What is that rising globe over the horizon?" Then, after a moment of keen scrutiny, she added, "it is a balloon; it is a balloon, as I live!"

"You have good sight," said the prince. "I see something against the leaden cloud trails, but I cannot distinguish what it is. It is very likely a war balloon somewhere near Suakim, from which the outlooks are watching operations——"

"And those clouds," broke in Dorothy, breathlessly, "those clouds which we thought were only vapor. Do you see what they are?"

"No," said the prince gravely.

"The smoke of battle, comrade," she cried excitedly. "They are fighting. Can you not see it all? It is as plain as if I had my binoculars right here in my hand. It must be something terrific; and the huge balloon is watching it all from a height, probably telegraphing reports to Suakim——"

"And on to Cairo——"

"And on to England and to America!" cried Dorothy, with the rapture of one inspired.

The prince laughed hysterically. Indeed, for the first time it seemed as if they were looking down into the promised land, and it was to be theirs.

The prince lay upon his back, gazing upward. "You must be right," he said, "for do you see these vultures flying over from the desert? They are the scavengers of the battlefield. One can always tell where there is fighting by watching the course of a flock of them."

Then he leaped up, throwing out his hands as if a sudden revelation had descended upon him.

"I have it!" he cried, and he drew forth his little note book and pencil, writing in a small, clear hand, the following message:

TO THE COMMANDER OF THE ENGLISH FORCES AT SUAKIM:

Two refugees from Khartoum are advancing from the Kohreb range toward Suakim. One is Miss Dorothy Stanslaus, of New York, who arrived in the Khartoum district by balloon from the Congo; the other Prince Bardoff, of the Russian embassy at Khartoum. We are the only ones who have escaped, and our rescue was a miracle. The Mahdi is dead. He was poisoned by a Greek girl taken prisoner at Khartoum, whom the Mahdi made his slave. He died on June 24. As the country between the Kohreb and Suakim is alive with the forces of Osman Digna, we are in grave danger of being taken prisoners. Come out to meet us on the Berber road, and so save us from a terrible fate. Miss Stanslaus was known as the "angel of light" among the Mahdies, and her coming was supposed to be by divine call of the Mahdi. So far she is safe. For the rest of the journey, if you do not come speedily to the rescue it is very doubtful if she ever reaches civilization: Telegraph St. Petersburg and New York. God save us!

PRINCE BARDOFF.

Having finished these tidings, the prince took from his pocket the bright scarlet flag of the emir Mahmud el Fiki, which was wrapped around the pouch of the sheik messenger, and tore it into ribbons. Into one of these with extreme care he tied the letter.

"And what do you intend to do with that?" said Dorothy, when all was done.

"Watch me," replied the man of expedients.

Climbing up and out upon one of the loftiest ledges Bardoff lay down and bared his bosom to the sky, like one dead.

The ruse had its desired effect. From the desert steppes the vultures came flocking over the range, flying high till they met the mountains. Not more than ten minutes elapsed before one of these huge birds, attracted by what appeared to be a feast right beneath him, landed upon the crag and strutted forward. As he came cautiously within reach of Bardoff the bird was seized by the legs and neck. Then Dorothy bound the message to the bird's leg, after which the screaming messenger was allowed to go free.

The vulture fluttered out, sinking upon lower ledges twice and pecking at the scarlet ribbons; but finally it recovered its strength and took up the midair trail with its comrades and disappeared toward the battlefield.

"Bravo!" shouted Dorothy. "That has worked so well, let us try another."

"Good," said Bardoff. "Go into hiding and write your message as I wrote mine, and in the mean time I will have another Mercury to do your bidding."

The note was written tremulously, none too clear, and not one millionth part was said; but with a call from the crag top, Dorothy hastened up to find that the prince had captured another and a larger bird. It was soon served like its comrade, and started toward the scene of carnage.

"A marvelous bit of wit!" mused Dorothy, as she was passed down to their ambush. "I wonder if it will succeed?"

"Wait," interposed Bardoff. "Nothing is a success till it succeeds. We shall see."

After a wholesome supper that night in their hiding place, they loaded the provisions upon one of the camels, and each of the travelers taking another, the march down the eastern steppes of the mountain range was resumed in

the direction of Tambuk, where they had hopes of discovering the first English outposts by daybreak of the following morning.

Taking great risks in order to accomplish the gigantic task of reaching the British lines with speed and certainty, they were favored with a mist in the gray of early morning, which obscured them from the enemy encamped about the straw hut villages of the Hadendowa tribes. But, unfortunately, when the vapors arose, it disclosed to them the exceeding peril of their own position. They would gladly have retreated to the mountains had they the opportunity; but now there was nothing to do but to trust to diplomacy.

One thing was certain; they were nearing the English lines. This conviction in their hearts buoyed them up.

Dorothy had covered her head and face, after the manner of oriental women; and the ruse saved them from instant arrest. One or two camel boys were picked up on the way to cudgel the three beasts into a constant trot; and from them was learned the news.

There had been three months of fighting about Suakim. Osman Digna was near Handeb, twelve miles from the port of safety, and a mighty battle was in progress. Digna was winning day by day over the accursed infidels. He had a hundred thousand armed men, while the English had a few foreigners, and some Abyssinians, who knew nothing at all of fighting.

The tidings were far from cheering to the two fugitives, but allowance had to be made for eastern license.

"We have not heard the other side of the story," mused Bardoff.

Still, after what he had seen at Khartoum, it was not to be wondered that he inclined a too willing ear to the enthusiastic tales of the Arab camel lads. He kept the fears in his heart from his companion, for she was in that state of mind when a little adverse news might mean total mental collapse.

Suddenly in the narrow defile a picket sprang out and demanded the password. At first the prince was for riding him down; but, seeing the threatening gesture on the part of the soldier, he answered something in a low guttural.

The soldier ran forward and seized the camel rope, shoving a rifle muzzle full into the rider's face.

"The password!" he commanded; "the password!"

"Come hither and I will whisper it to you," said the prince; then, as the picket came closer, he slipped a shining sovereign into the man's hand.

The fellow trembled and looked alarmed, fearing the act had been seen.

"Son of the faithful," said the prince, "I have forgotten the password. Tell it to me."

The picket hesitated, then whispered back, "El Mahdi el Muntazar!" ("The Mahdi is the Messiah.")

"Thank you," said the prince, and passed on.

Another three or four miles, and then three more pickets burst from a clump of mimosa.

"The password, stranger!" cried one.

"El Mahdi el Muntazar!" answered the prince promptly, striking the camel with the flat of his sword as he spoke.

He had not jogged on a rod before the three guards were upon him.

"The password, stranger!" commanded one of the pickets again. "On thy life give it, or by the Mahdi's God, thou diest if thou shalt attempt to pass."

"El Mahdi el Muntazar!" repeated the prince savagely.

"True," said the guard. "The Mahdi is the messiah; but what has that to do with the password, without which no man can advance here? Come, out with it!"

Bardoff beckoned to him. "I will whisper it to thee, son of the faithful," he said. As the savage approached he slipped a sovereign into his hand.

Unfortunately the coin dropped with a ring on the skull of a camel, which stood upright in the white path. The two other guards say it.

The camel boy grabbed the gold piece and restored it to Bardoff.

"You are our prisoners!" cried all three at once. "Quick! Dismount—both of you!"

In silence the refugees dismounted.

"It's all up!" moaned Bardoff to poor Dorothy. "We are prisoners of war, right on the threshold of victory. That scoundrel of a picket back there took my money and then lied to me. God help us!"

A sob escaped from the folds of the disguising cloak.

CHAPTER XXXII.—THE ENGLISH FORCES HEAR STRANGE NEWS.

THE British lion was aroused at the death of Gordon. A great expedition was immediately despatched to take Suakim and punish the dervish forces. One evening, after a terrific engagement with the natives, in which they were put to flight, the British forces had withdrawn into the protecting circle of a zereba stockade for the night.

Ambulances and nurses had gone out on the battlefield to bring in the wounded. With the hospital corps were two brothers just out from the old country, and new to all the sights of the Nile region.

As the two worked over the wounded one of them chanced to spy a vulture among the dead. He jumped up and called out:

"Say, fer the love o' heaving, wot's these birds flyin' around us and squawkin' like fishwomen?"

"Them? Why, you blasted hidjut, them is vultures."

"What?"

"Bloody vultures, yer fool. Don't let nobody hear you arsk any such ignorant questions. Whew! but the lean buzzards must be mighty hungry——"

"Hello, Tom, ef 'ere ain't a vulture with his leg done up in a red rag, as ef he'd been just discharged from a bloomin' vulture 'orspital."

"Aw, g'on!" The skeptical brother was turning over a lancer and looking earnestly into his face for a sign of life.

"Fact, and I'll prove it," said the other doggedly, as if his word had been impeached. The vulture was famished, and suffered the inquisitive man to draw near. Then came a pistol shot, and the big bird fell to the ground.

"Down 'im?"

"Yep; and it's agin orders, too. Horficer lookin' at me with his bloomin' field glasses, thinks I plunked a wounded sheik. I'll show him." He lifted the dead vulture in full view.

"Wait a bit!" he said. "I'm goin' to see wot this confounded feathered hyena carries around with him——"

"Come on, or we'll get a reprimand," growled the elder brother.

"Just a minute!" persisted the other. "Jove! if there isn't some sort of a paper wrapped up inside of the scarlet rag, and writin' all over it, too."

"Mighty queer," said the other. "Let's see it. Sure enough. There's writin', and damme if it ain't English writin', too. Wish it wasn't so dark," he mused. "Rawther like to see what the cove has got to say, whoever 'e is."

"See here!" came a sharp command from the left. "You orderlies are a long time making trips. What were you shooting out there?"

"A bloomin' halbatross, sir, with red rags tied to his legs——"

"Halbatross nothin', you fool! It was a vulture, sir——"

"I mean a vulture," apologized the younger. "And the rags done up a message in English, sir. Don't know w'ere it come from. Here it is, sir."

The officer approached and took the crumpled sheet.

"I say, Simmons," he called out to a brother officer near, "look at this. Two orderlies found it tied to the leg of a vulture they killed. Mighty queer——" He passed it to his comrade at arms.

"I don't see anything so remarkable——"

"You don't? Why, read, man. It's a message from some one escaped from Khartoum."

The officer gave a sneer. "Nobody escaped from Khartoum—nobody could escape. Don't I know these Mahdiists like my book of tactics? Bah!"

"But see! The man says that the Mahdi is dead—poisoned—ten days ago or more, and that Abdulla is his successor. You must agree that the thing is very extraordinary."

The listener was rubbing his chin meditatively. "Take it to the colonel," he said, and turned away to his work.

So the message went to the colonel, and the colonel, much impressed, convened a score of officers inside the zereba. The strange document was read and reread aloud, its history exploited, and then a young lieutenant broke forth with:

"Why, certainly it's genuine. I know Bardoff—met him in Cairo. Tall chap, built like Apollo, and a remarkable linguist. He was supposed to have fallen at Khartoum."

"As for the girl and the balloon business," broke in another officer slowly, "surely you remember the stir the matter made when the news was sent abroad that an American girl and five young explorers left the Congo region, the men being killed, leaving the girl in the balloon alone——"

"Exactly, and her brother is in his yacht at Cairo now," interposed another. "Wanted to go up the Nile on the hunt for her, but they wouldn't let him on account of the dervish troubles. Why, it's all perfectly plain. They are over there in the Kohreb range, sure as you're born, and waiting to be rescued."

"Well, we must save them, that's all." The superior officer waved to his aide. "Make a copy of that and hurry the original on to Suakim. Are they signaling still?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then send this message by signal as well, stating particulars."

Soon the fact that there was a Russian prince and an American girl over behind the enemy toward the mountain range was spread abroad, and that last realization gave the vast concourse of soldiery a quickening stir.

They were grateful for the tidings of the fall of the Mahdi, which seemed to make the contest over the dark continent doubly easy. They were now ready to prove their gratitude for the news by making a furious dash to the poor pilgrims' rescue.

Throughout the short evening there was a severe comparing of notes and memories, and every jot of fact regarding Bardoff and his fair companion eagerly sought and devoured. Men who knew the details of the Congo event, which some months since had run an icy shudder through all America and half the world beside, were speedily found. Others there were who knew that the Mahdi had claimed to have received an angel from heaven, and that she had brought him the tidings that he was never to be defeated in battle, and that he would live a hundred years, to conquer and reform the world. Others knew Prince Bardoff and something of his history. The whole matter fitted in like fragments of a mosaic.

From dumfounded wonder and grateful content, there sprang a mighty chivalry. The thought of a young girl, escaped from Khartoum, and still in dire peril, inspired every manly heart with a desire to help her.

"Do you know," said the colonel of the regiment, "I believe that three hundred men could take up the Berber trail and bring those poor souls into camp before daybreak——"

"Call for volunteers," suggested his companion. "Three thousand will respond."

"No doubt, no doubt," said the colonel. "But——"

The sentence was never finished, for the reason that two messengers arrived at almost one and the same moment. One announced that a wounded Arab in the hospital tent had suddenly regained his legs, after having heard the conversation of the surgeons and become enlightened upon every detail it were best to reserve from the enemy, and sped into the closing darkness. Three shots were fired after him without effect.

"An English speaking spy, undoubtedly," mused the colonel, gritting his teeth.

The other messenger brought the startling tidings that the outposts signaled the gathering of the enemy on the heights toward Otao; and that without doubt a night attack was meditated. It was a death blow to the proposed rescue of the Russian prince and the "angel of light." Within ten minutes the mighty army rose, after a little season of rest, and stared toward the bleak hills, over which was soon to pour the combined forces of the Mahdists, intent on crushing the invading host before the light of another day.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A THREE MAN BREEZE.

BY CAPTAIN HENRY P. HARRISON.

Castaways as the result of a submarine earthquake—The peculiar craft which picked them up and the extraordinary fashion in which they are made to work their passage.

MORE years ago than I care to remember, I was mate of a Salam brig called the Arethusa. We were on a trading voyage in the South Pacific, and one morning I came on deck to find the brig totally becalmed about two hundred miles to the eastward of the Pearl Islands.

Now generally speaking it is seldom so calm even in tropic seas but that the under swell, which is really the ocean's heart throb, is not felt to a greater or less extent. And, as seafarers will tell you, the dead calm suddenly following a heavy gale is of far more discomfort than the gale itself for this reason.

Without a breath of wind to steady her, the vessel is rolled and pitched and tossed by the long smooth swells in the most exasperating manner.

But on this occasion no mill pond could have been smoother than was the surface of the sea. As I stood staring over the taffrail my sunburned, bearded face looked upward at me as though reflected from a great mirror.

Hot? I could not bear my hand on the wood work, much less on the brass guard rail. The pitchy deck planks were like hot iron; the sun blazed down from an unclouded sky till the stifling air seemed to quiver like the rising heat from a blast furnace.

Curiously, the one least affected by the heat was our second officer, a young fellow from New England, Joe Raymond by name.

But Raymond's was one of those happy go lucky natures that can adapt themselves to almost any circumstances. Though a comparatively young man, his life had been a strange one, he having been a wanderer all over the navigable globe, since at the tender age of twelve he ran away to sea.

"There's nothing so bad that it mightn't be worse" was his favorite saying under the most adverse circumstances.

"Pretty warm, Mr. Harrison; but I've seen it warmer by at least ten degrees on the equator," he said cheerfully.

I growled something to the effect that I didn't want to see it any hotter. Captain Parks, who had been down for a look at the barometer, said likewise.

"Hark! Is that thunder?" he suddenly exclaimed.

A low, inarticulate rumble echoed sullenly over the oily expanse, yet there was not the sign of a cloud in the steely sky. No, it could not be thunder.

Again came the mysterious rumble, louder and nearer. It was attended by a strange quivering or vibration of the oily surface, which, communicating itself to the brig's hull, caused her to tremble in every timber.

"A submarine earthquake," said Captain Parks, concisely.

As we stood half awe struck a strange phenomenon suddenly presented

itself to our astonished gaze. Against the horizon line, which a moment before had been an unbroken level, appeared a lofty elevation, as though a high island of great length had suddenly risen from the bottom of the sea. But a second look showed only too plainly that this remarkable appearance was a vast bulk of water coming down upon us with terrific speed.

"A tidal wave, set in motion by the submarine earthquake," exclaimed Captain Parks, as, fully **alive to the threatened danger**, which no human skill or power could avert, we stared blankly in each other's faces.

For the brig, not being under steerage way, was slowly drifting round in a sort of irregular circle. Should the wave strike her broadside to——

"Into the starboard rigging, and hang on for your lives!" roared the captain, as the Lascar crew, with wild yells, ran to the rail as though to throw themselves over the side.

I saw Captain Parks spring for the main rigging, even as he gave the command. Raymond and I made a simultaneous rush in the same direction.

But we were too late. There was a great upheaval, and the doomed brig, caught broadside to, was swept upward and rolled over like a cork.

I remember being submerged under tons of green seas, and rising gasping to the surface, which was strewn with broken debris from the vessel's deck.

This I noticed first, and then I saw for a brief moment what I felt sure was the keel of the capsized brig, dotted with four or five black specks that I knew were men clinging to it, on the crest of the receding wave, which was sweeping steadily on to the westward.

"Bad job, Mr. Harrison," said a voice not far distant, and turning my head as I struck out I saw Raymond sitting astride the brig's foretopsail yard, which, with part of the sail and gear attached, had been torn from the shattered mast by the terrible force of the sea.

"I should say it *was* bad," I responded, as, having myself reached the spar, I freed my eyes and mouth of salt water and looked wonderingly at the speaker, hardly knowing whether to admire or be vexed at his coolness.

"Well, it might be worse," he replied, but I could by no means take the same philosophical view.

A hundred and fifty miles at least from land, in danger from starvation, thirst and sharks, and out of the track of sailing vessels, it occurred to me that we were about as bad off as we could be.

But I said nothing, and so for the rest of the scorching day we clung to the spar, conversing at brief intervals and straining our eyes across the smooth waters in vain search of the sail which neither of us was hopeful of seeing.

A little after noon a coming breeze was indicated by a faint black line close down against the edge of the eastern horizon. And against the dark line was a white object, which seeming to keep pace with the approaching breath of the northeast monsoon, took the definite shape of a single small sail heading almost directly for us.

"A flying proa!" I exclaimed as it came onward with inconceivable velocity.

And this indeed it was, though differing from those peculiar to the Ladrone and Friendly Islands. These latter, I may say in passing, are double enders,

with the mast and lateen sail amidships. Instead of "wearing ship," the helmsman simply moves to the opposite side of the proa with his long paddle, retrims the sail, and is already headed in the opposite direction.

But the craft on board of which Raymond and myself were taken twenty minutes from the time when we had first sighted her, was of different construction in some respects. And as few if any of my readers may have seen one of the kind, I may be pardoned if I give the description somewhat in detail.

From measurements afterward made I should say that the proa was twenty three feet long, and had exactly *fourteen inches* of beam, with a depth of six inches when loaded.

Hollowed from a log of *tamassi* wood, itself almost as buoyant as cork, this proa had a wedge-like bow and a square stern, with a long slanting overhang.

The mast and a sprit, which really combined the sprit and boom, were both of stout bamboo, while the "lug" sail, rather wider on the head than its foot, was woven of a stout fibrous grass.

But the peculiar feature—the one in which lay the principal secret of the proa's speed—was the outrigger, a heavy ironwood log, sharpened at both ends to offer as little resistance as possible to the water, hung at right angles with the hull.

When we first took our places in the proa, whose master was a lithe, olive hued native, wearing a "billycock" hat, a waist cloth and a pair of faded red silk stockings, the breeze was comparatively light, and the weight of the outrigger alone served to keep the craft on a tolerably even keel while the wind was well on the quarter.

The motion was most exhilarating. I could compare it to nothing but an ice boat, so smooth and evenly did the quaint craft slip over the sea, which was beginning to run in short, even swells.

The port watch, who stood well forward on the lookout, took no part whatever in the conversation. His eyes were steadfastly fixed on the horizon ahead, where I fancied I could see a faint hazy loom indicative of land.

The breeze grew steadily stronger, and as the proa's rate of sailing increased I climbed up on the foot of the after arm of the outrigger, where, clasping the mast with one arm, I began enjoying the novelty of the situation.

"Sails like a yacht now, eh, Harrison?" called Raymond, leaning involuntarily to windward as the frail craft, whose gunwale was not a foot from the frothing seas, kept "heeling" more and more, despite the counterbalance of the heavy outrigger.

"S'pose bime by we soon hab 'three man' breeze you see 'em sail," again remarked the starboard watch, and I began to think he might, after all, be a colored man of truth and veracity.

"Wonder what a 'three man' breeze is?" asked Raymond, as he glanced over his shoulder at the narrow ribbon of foam streaming after the broad bladed paddle wielded by the muscular helmsman.

"Perhaps when it blows so hard that it takes three to steer," I suggested rather foolishly. But it was not long before I saw my mistake.

For presently the port watch sang out something in his native tongue that I knew by his accompanying gestures meant "Land ho!" And obedient

to a rapid order from the helmsman, the starboard watch flattened in the main sheet, thereby causing the proa to lie over at an alarming angle.

Then, at another order from the man at the oar, the port watch ran out on one arm of the outrigger like a monkey, and to my great astonishment, dropped down in a squatting position on the pointed log, where he clung with both hands to some withes of twisted bark.

"Sails like a steamer *now!*" shouted Raymond, who had witnesses this procedure with quite as much surprise as myself.

"This only 'one man' breeze," said the starboard watch—"you wait lilly bit more." And then the full significance of the expression broke in on my mind.

A "two man breeze" would in all probability send the starboard watch out on the outrigger. And what if it blew a "three man breeze?"

I glanced at Raymond, who, evidently having the same thought in his mind, returned the look with one of quizzical drollery.

"Wonder if we'll have to draw lots to see which of us is to act as shifting ballast?" he bawled, as a stronger puff of wind nearly sent the proa on her beam ends.

Before I had a chance to reply, the tall helmsman called out something to the starboard watch, which I naturally interpreted as an order for him to join the port watch. But it wasn't. Touching Raymond on the shoulder he pointed to the outrigger, and said in tones of unmistakable import:

"*You go 'long of oder man—dat way you work your passage!*"

I was mean enough to laugh at the expression on poor Raymond's face, as, after vainly expostulating, he cautiously crawled out and took his place at the end of the outrigger, which was oftener under than on top of the water.

My mirth was short lived. The buoyant craft was now fairly flying, and as a stronger puff of wind nearly capsized us, the starboard watch imperatively ordered me to take my place beside the other two.

Entreaty to be excused was as useless as resistance could have been, and a moment or two later found me hanging for dear life to the after end of the outrigger, which I am positive was dashing through the seas at the rate of full twenty knots an hour.

Raymond almost forgot his own deplorable situation in grim enjoyment of mine. At every forward jump of the proa we were almost submerged, and a dozen times I was nearly swept away.

"How do you like this for a new sensation?" I shouted to Raymond just before we reached a tremendous line of breakers at the mouth of the river which empties into a little bay on the east side of the island.

"It might be worse—and I'm afraid it's going to be!" he roared, pointing to the great combers directly ahead. But luckily for us the breeze lessened and the drenched and shivering ballast was allowed to shift itself inboard.

We found shelter with a Scotch carpenter who had been wrecked on the island ten years before, and made it his home, till we were taken off by a native trading vessel and transferred to the American schooner *Jane Adams*. But I have it to remember that under very unpleasant circumstances I have sailed at the rate of twenty knots an hour in a "three man breeze."

THE ARGOSY.

VOL. XXIX.

JANUARY, 1899.

No. 2.

THE QUEEN'S BODY GUARD.

BY DOUGLAS ZABRISKIE DOTY.

The story of a secretaryship procured under strange circumstances and which led to extraordinary developments—The fair mistress of the Chateau de Frenot, her relentless foes, her faithful friends, and what came of the clash between them.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.—THE ADVERTISEMENT IN "THE TIMES."

A HEAVY, yellowish gray fog wrapped the city of London with the darkness of night, though it was early noon. Now and then a slow moving vehicle, with the driver at the horse's head, loomed suddenly up out of the impenetrable mist, to be as quickly swallowed out of sight again.

In a cozy sitting room in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with shades drawn and gas lighted, sat two young men. One of them, whose apartment it was, roasted his feet on the fender and puffed leisurely at a great brier pipe. He was English; one could tell it by his ruddy complexion, the cut of his clothes, and the inflection of his voice. He was a stocky, well built young man of about six and twenty, with an interesting and thoughtful face.

His companion was clearly a Yankee, tall, lithe, and high strung by nature; and possessed of the wiry activity and keen alertness characteristic of his race. He was sitting by a table, on which were the remnants of their late lunch, reading the advertising sheet of the *Times*.

Suddenly he gave an exclamation:

"Dick!" he cried; "listen to this." Then slowly and distinctly he read aloud:

"WANTED, a young man of education, speaking both French and English, to act as private secretary to author. Applicants for the position will please forward photographs and full particulars. Liberal salary. Address Jean Daron, Santilly, France."

"What do you make of it?" queried the American, throwing down the paper.

Dick Struthers looked thoughtfully at the ceiling. "Something rather fishy about it, I should say," was his rejoinder.

"It does sound unusual," continued the other, "especially that part about

sending your photo. But I dare say the old codger, whoever he may be, is what the French call an *eccentrique*; and, any way, whatever may be behind that odd advertisement, I mean to try for the position. I cannot afford to let an opportunity slip. I've lived too long on your charity as it is."

"Tommyrot!" growled Dick Struthers. "You've simply been my guest for a month, and a deuced lot of pleasure it has given me, too. I shall hate to have you leave!"

And the Englishman meant it sincerely. He had taken a great liking to the handsome, well bred young American, Henry Cottrell, on whom fortune had smiled brightly in youth, but had of late turned to him the cold shoulder.

Struthers was the younger son of Lord Clandennett of Surrey, and could call himself the "Honorable Richard" if he chose, which he never did.

Of a rather democratic nature, he found bachelor quarters in London more congenial than the ancestral hall. He was a barrister by profession, though as yet with little or no practice. Possessed of a large income, that fact did not worry him.

Poor Cottrell had not found London an easy place in which to get a berth, handicapped as he was by the utter lack of business training. He had been fitted for the life of a gentleman of leisure, so his accomplishments were all of the superficial order.

This position of a private secretary seemed exactly to fit in with his abilities. In his "palmy days" he had traveled through France, and he possessed a perfect knowledge of the country and its language.

One evening, about a week after he had despatched his application for the position of private secretary, inclosing his portrait, he received a letter from France. On the back of the envelope, emblazoned in red and gold, was the crest of a noble family.

Now Cottrell had already given up all hope of ever hearing from the unknown "Jean Daron," so imagine his surprise when he read the following, written in French, in a fine hand:

TO MONS. HENRY COTTRELL,

Dear Sir: You are engaged for a month's trial as my private secretary at a salary of five hundred francs per month. If you agree to these terms, write me (don't telegraph) at once stating when you can come. I will mail you immediately funds for traveling expenses.

To reach my place take the channel steamer to Calais, thence by rail to Turonne, where a vehicle will be waiting to convey you to your destination.

At the station do not so much as mention where you are going. If any one should ask, say you are bound for Sorbette to sketch. This town is a favorite resort of tourists and lies on the road to Santilly.

Wait until a man who answers to the name of Jean Daron addresses you. It is he whom I will send to meet you.

Kindly adhere strictly to the plan here set forth, and the reason for all this mystery shall be explained when we meet.

M. A. DE VILLIERS, Chateau de Frenoir,
Santilly, France.

The two friends sat up late that night discussing the strange missive, but even Struthers, with all his keenness for ferreting out a mystery, was quite at sea.

Regarding the character of de Villiers, or Jean Daron, or whatever the man's name might be, he expressed himself as follows:

"The fellow is either an *eccentrique* as you suggest, Henry, or else he is a blackleg, up to some illegitimate game, and I strongly suspect the latter is the truth. I only wish," he added regretfully, "that I looked enough like you to palm myself off as the original of your photograph. I would leave you here to look after my weighty law business, while I went in search of what adventures might befall me as the secretary."

But of course such a substitution would be at once suspected, and so was out of the question. It was decided, however, that Cottrell should keep his friend fully acquainted with what took place in his new abode, and Struthers agreed to "run over" in his yacht before long.

By way of a parting gift he presented Cottrell with a sword cane and a brace of pistols of the most modern type. Cottrell laughed heartily at this warlike equipment, but the young barrister remarked laconically: "You never can tell."

The journey by rail to Dover and thence by the jaunty little channel steamer to Calais was accomplished without incident and in comfort, thanks to a calm sea and the funds sent by Cottrell's mysterious employer. After a brief halt at Paris he was off again, whizzing southward.

He was well supplied with current literature, but he could not fix his thoughts on anything save the strange, unknown future towards which he was hurrying.

Presently, the train slowed up and came to a stop at a little coast village. It was a garrisoned town, as was plainly told by the fortress visible through the trees on a bluff overlooking the sea, its big black guns so placed as to guard the approach to the miniature harbor.

On the platform was a knot of officers, bidding farewell to one of their number. They were gesticulating and grimacing, after the manner of all Frenchmen.

Cottrell, as it happened, was the only occupant of his compartment, much to his satisfaction, for he was in a mood for solitude, and he was therefore rather chagrined when the guard flung the door open and a tall, swarthy man with piercing black eyes, and in the fatigue uniform of a lieutenant in the French army, clambered in.

As the train had not yet started, the officers who had walked down to see him off, grouped themselves by the open door and kept up an animated conversation in their own language.

Cottrell could not help overhearing what they said. They were discussing the imminence of a Spanish-American war. The American Minister to Spain had just received his passports, so one remarked.

This was news to Cottrell, and he pricked up his ears.

"I'll tell you what it is," one of the officers was saying, "we shall see war declared within the week."

"*Mon Dieu!* I hope so," exclaimed the tall lieutenant in a harsh voice. "The Spanish soldier would teach those loud mouthed American pigs a lesson they'd not soon forget."

"*Parbleu*, you're right, René," chimed in a little subaltern, "and I only hope we are able to pick a quarrel with the States, too; we'd show 'em what it is to run up against real fighters. Faugh! What are those Americans but a nation of shopkeepers, any way!"

The little dandy's remarks were greeted with a chorus of approval, and Cottrell, with clenched hands and set teeth, was trying to decide which man he would knock down first when the engine whistled, and the train began to move slowly out of the station.

"*Au revoir*," shouted the little subaltern, waving his cap. "I trust your call on mademoiselle will be more pleasant than the last one, and that papa is more generous with his hundred franc notes. Remember, you still owe me a bet of eighty francs and I'm very hard up."

These sallies called forth a volley of laughter from the little group at the station, and René scowled after them as the train bore him away.

For several minutes he gazed out of the window, lost in reverie. Evidently his thoughts were not of the pleasantest, for the scowl deepened, and his eyes gleamed ferociously.

Presently he turned away and fumbled about in his pocket till he hauled out a cigarette case; he helped himself, then suddenly recollecting his traveling companion, he held out the case to him with that inimitable politeness of the Frenchman which fits him so well and means so little. It was his impression that Cottrell was an English tourist.

"*En voulez vous?*" he asked.

The American leaned slightly forward and, looking the Frenchman straight in the eye he replied in a low, distinct voice, in French: "No, I cannot accept. I am an American."

CHAPTER II.—THE FIRST ADVENTURE.

AT Cottrell's words the Frenchman started as though he had been struck, and his face flushed darkly. The next instant he had regained his composure and lighted his cigarette with an airy flourish.

"Really!" he observed, with a sneer. "Then, I'm afraid—puff—puff—that you did not—puff—enjoy my remarks—puff—upon your esteemed countrymen."

Henry Cottrell was a man who knew the advantage of keeping his temper in an unpleasant situation. So it was in an apparently calm voice that he next spoke.

"I can't understand the feelings of a man who carries politeness so far as to offer his cigarettes to an utter stranger and almost in the same breath insults a brave and noble race of men. Even with us shopkeepers—as you call us—we would not class such a man as a gentleman."

At this implication, delivered in such an even, everyday tone of voice, the lieutenant half started from his seat, the blue veins swelling on his forehead.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I am no gentleman?" he hissed, almost beside himself with rage.

"You seem surprised," remarked the other, with exasperating coolness. "Has no one ever told you that before?"

"No one ever has and lived!" cried the lieutenant, livid with passion, and the next instant he had struck Cottrell full in the face.

Now, if Cottrell had been a French officer he would have known that that blow was a challenge to a duel, but being simply an American, and finding himself hit, he hit back, and with such effect that the lieutenant's cranium went crashing against the panel of the door and he lay insensible upon the floor. Luckily for him the lock was a stout one, or he might have been pitched out of the railway carriage to certain death.

As Cottrell gazed upon the prostrate form of his late antagonist, he felt that he was in what the Yankees call "a pickle."

Knowing, as he did, the almost absolute power exerted in France by the army and how sacred is the person of an officer, he realized that he might expect small mercy at the hands of those in authority if he did not make good his escape before the lieutenant came to, or the railroad officials discovered his condition.

The offense would mean at least a year's imprisonment at hard labor for assault.

His chances of ever reaching his destination had grown suddenly slim. But like all Americans he was quick to think and quick to act.

He picked up the limp body of the Frenchman and propped it up in a corner, pulling his visored cap down over his eyes, so as to hide as much of the ghastly face as possible. Spreading a newspaper in the man's lap, Cottrell surveyed his work, and gave a nod of satisfaction. To all appearances the man was simply taking a little nap.

Suddenly above the roar of the train he heard a shrill whistle and the slamming of the door of a compartment somewhere ahead.

"The conductor on his rounds," thought he, and like a flash he darted at the officer and searched through his pockets with eager fingers, till he found the man's ticket.

And none too soon, for there at the door was the ruddy bearded face of the official standing on the guard step.

"*Billets, messieurs,*" he called out cheerily, poking in his head, and he glanced inquisitively at the motionless officer.

Cottrell handed him both tickets, remarking as he did so: "My friend here is taking a nap. A little too much good cheer, I'm afraid, before he started."

The conductor laughed good naturedly and started to pass on.

"What's the next stop?" called out Cottrell.

"Turonne, monsieur," was the reply.

Cottrell felt a thrill of hope at that. His destination was at hand, and he knew by the other's ticket that his stopping place was the next station beyond Turonne.

"If he only continues unconscious till we arrive I may yet escape," thought the American, as he watched with feverish impatience for the slackening up of the train.

About ten minutes later (though it seemed to him like ten hours) there came the grinding and jarring that told of brakes applied, and the next minute the train was at a standstill before the little station of Turonne.

As the guard unlocked the door of the compartment in which Cottrell was waiting to be released he caught sight of the recumbent figure in the corner and made as though to rouse him.

"No, no!" cried Cottrell, stepping in his path. "He does not get out till the next stop. He is very tired and does not want to be disturbed. Don't put anybody else in with him if you can help it. Here's a franc."

"*Tres bien, monsieur,*" replied the guard, pocketing the coin, and he effusively helped Cottrell with his two portmanteaux, and deposited them on the platform.

The American looked eagerly around, but apparently there was no one waiting for him. It was a small village evidently, and only one public conveyance was in sight, the driver of which was fast asleep on his box.

Picking up his luggage, he walked quickly around to the back of the station. As he did so, a short, rather stout man, with a large hat pulled down over his eyes, came out of the shadow of the building, and peered into Cottrell's face.

"Ah, Monsieur Cottrell," he said briskly, "I am Jean Daron. Step this way, please."

Cottrell followed the man down a short narrow lane, hedged in on both sides by tall bushes, and at the end of it was a sort of covered farmer's wagon, loaded with produce and sacks of meal.

"Step in," said the man.

Henry Cottrell hesitated. This man, who was nothing but a *bourgeois*, and his country conveyance, were so unlike what Cottrell had expected that he stood bewildered.

There was something very strange about an employer whose position required a private secretary, sending for him this queer rig.

"Come, come, monsieur," growled Jean Daron. "We've no time to lose. Hello, what's that?"

The two men started, for a great commotion and hubbub were heard from the direction of the railway station, where the train still stood.

One of the men knew only too well what it meant.

In a few hurried words he explained to Daron his adventure with the lieutenant.

"And now," concluded Cottrell, "you've got to hide me some way, or I'm caught, sure."

"It's a bad bit of business, monsieur," replied the Frenchman, shaking his head gloomily, "and especially coming just at this time. There's nothing to do but to stick you in the bottom of the cart, and make a bold run for it in the open."

In a moment Cottrell found himself nearly smothered underneath the sacks of meal, the cart was soon bumping and jolting along over the rough country road.

They had not gone a quarter of a mile when there was noise of shouting

close in the rear, and a couple of local gendarmes and several hangers on of the village came panting up to the cart.

"Ha, there! Stop!" called out a voice.

And Daron obediently pulled in his horse.

"Have you seen anything of a foreigner with a pointed beard and carrying two portmanteaux?" demanded one of the gendarmes. "He is wanted for an assault on a lieutenant from Grandpre, and he left the train here."

Jean, with a stolid expression on his face, flicked a fly off his horse with his whip and then scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Come, come, man, where are your wits?" cried the gendarme impatiently.

"Did he wear a soft gray hat?" queried Jean.

"Yes, yes," cried out several voices. "That's the man."

"Because," continued Jean slowly, "if that is the fellow you are looking for, he went down that road"—here he pointed in a direction at right angles to the way they were going. "And he was on foot, but walking very rapidly."

The whole pack turned and went at full speed down the road indicated by Jean, while that worthy called out to the nearly suffocated Cottrell that he might come out of his dusty hiding place, which he did with all alacrity.

"They'll have to go a long way down *that* road before they find you," chuckled Daron, as the American took his place beside him.

CHAPTER III.—DE VILLIERS REVEALS HIS IDENTITY.

AFTER they had traveled a couple of miles Jean allowed his horse to come down to a walk, after making sure no one was in pursuit, and in this way they traveled on for about half an hour in silence, each one engrossed in his own thoughts.

Cottrell noticed, from the direction they were taking and from the fact that the air grew stronger and sharper each mile, that they were approaching the coast.

The sun had already set, and the shadows of evening were creeping up with great rapidity, so that it shortly became impossible to clearly distinguish objects about them. The road grew heavy and sandy and the trees thicker, until presently they were in quite a dense wood with no sign of life anywhere.

Cottrell, in spite of himself, felt a bit awed by the strangeness of his surroundings.

"Where are we now?" he asked, more to break the silence than for the sake of information.

"You are in the park belonging to the Chateau de Frenoir," was the reply.

"It seems to be of considerable extent!"

"Yes, it covers two thousand acres and has a frontage on the sea of about a mile."

"Shall I see Monsieur de Villiers tonight?" inquired Cottrell, after a pause.

"Monsieur de Villiers?" repeated Jean Daron with peculiar emphasis, "Monsieur de Villiers?"

"To be sure!" replied Cottrell sharply. "My employer, Monsieur de Villiers!"

The man gave a queer, gurgling noise deep down in his throat, as though he were choking, and as Cottrell glanced sideways at him he caught a glimpse of white teeth displayed in a grin. The young American felt a bit nettled.

"I believe I have not been misinformed as to my employer's name; it is de Villiers, is it not?"

"Aye, it's de Villiers right enough," rejoined the other, his fat sides shaking with suppressed laughter. "*Oui, monsieur*; you will see h—him to-night!"

After this they lapsed into silence, broken only by an occasional deep chuckle from Daron, who seemed to be enjoying some joke hugely.

Cottrell began to feel more curious than ever regarding the identity of de Villiers, and he would have liked to put some leading questions to his companion, but he did not wish to reveal his curiosity to one who was evidently only a servant.

Already his adventure with the lieutenant had passed out of his thoughts. Little did he know what an important influence it would have on his life.

A twinkling light ahead told him they were approaching some habitation. A moment later the cart drew up before a small one storied thatched cottage such as is usually occupied by the French peasantry.

"We get out here!" said Daron in a quiet voice. And when they had clambered down and the horse had been tethered to a tree, Jean led the way into the cottage.

Cottrell found himself in a small, barren room, illumined by a dim, flickering oil lamp.

"Be seated, monsieur," said the rotund little fellow courteously, "and I will go and fetch Monsieur de Villiers!" and with that he went out, softly chuckling to himself.

Ten—twenty—thirty minutes, and still poor Cottrell sat there alone. He was beginning to grow weary of all this mystery. What was there about his unknown employer that made him resort to so much secrecy and subterfuge?

As though in answer to this unspoken question, there came the faint sound of feet on the gravel path without, and Daron reëntered, followed by a slight figure, completely muffled in outer wraps. The outer door was shut and locked, and then Daron, turning deferentially to the enveloped figure, said in a low voice: "It is all safe!"

The wraps were thrown aside and revealed to the astonished gaze of Cottrell the face and figure of a beautiful girl. She was very pale, and there was a sad, almost despairing look in her eyes that somehow went straight to his heart. When she spoke it was in a low, sweet voice, and her manner was one of quiet dignity.

"You are Monsieur Henri Cottrell, I believe!" She uttered his name with a pretty accent of her own that somehow gave a new meaning to it.

He bowed assent, and she gazed at him steadily for a moment with an

intense look in her eyes, as though she were reading his very soul. Then she sighed softly to herself, as though relieved of a doubt.

"And now, monsieur," she said with a touch of coquetry in her manner, "I suppose you would like to know who I am." Just the faint suspicion of a smile played about her lips. "I am M. A. de Villiers, your employer!"

"You—you Monsieur de Villiers?" gasped Cottrell.

"No!" replied the girl, smiling, "not *monsieur*, but *mademoiselle la comtesse*. There is no Monsieur de Villiers!"

"But I thought that——"

"That your employer would prove to be a man?" broke in the countess. "Quite natural under the circumstances; and I am afraid I must answer for the apparent deception. But when I have explained matters, I trust you will not blame me."

"Hush!" whispered Daron suddenly. He had been standing sentinel by an open window, and now he stood with one hand raised, to command silence, and the other close to his ear.

There was a faint crunching sound in the distance, that grew louder and nearer as the trio stood listening.

"Who is it, think you, Jean?" whispered the countess.

"*Secre*, it's your butler, Louis; I know his step—the fox—and he's coming to interview me, I could swear!"

Marie de Villiers seized Cottrell by the hand and forced him gently back into a curtained recess of the room, where they were completely hidden from view. At the same time Daron deftly and slowly lowered the one oil lamp till the whole room was in shadow, and then noiselessly he slid back the bolt of the front door and threw it wide open. Placing a chair against it, he comfortably seated himself, pipe in hand, his head thrown back like one who had come out to enjoy the balmy night air and had fallen asleep.

The bulky form of a man stopped before the cottage, and coming suddenly on the apparently sleeping Jean, he shook him roughly by the arm.

"Wake up, you old sleepy head!" cried the man. "Wake up, do you hear?"

As though still half asleep Jean sat up and yawned mightily.

"Well, well, Master Louis, what brings you here at this time of night?" he inquired. "Is it not time that you should be serving dinner for the countess?"

"The countess has already retired with a bad headache," returned the man, "and said she wished for no dinner. But I did not come here to tell you that!" he added insolently. "What I want to know is where have you been all the afternoon, when you ought to have been mending the walk that leads down to the water?"

Jean's little round eyes twinkled wickedly but lustily; it was too dark for the other to see his face.

"I don't know as that is any business of yours," he replied blandly. "But I have no objection to telling you. I have been towards Turonne for a load of potatoes and some sacks of meal!"

"Are you sure you weren't on some secret errand for her ladyship?" in-

quired the other suspiciously. "Come, Jean," he added, with oily persuasiveness, "think which side your bread is buttered on. You know it's the marquis, and not that snip of a girl, the Countess Marie, to whom we owe our places. He thinks she is up to some game or other, and if you and I can give him any information it will be the best day's work we ever did!"

While the butler was speaking, the girl's hand, which still lay unconsciously in Cottrell's, trembled violently, and he could hear her quick breathing.

"Friend Louis, you are a rare bird!" murmured Jean Daron, in accents of feigned admiration. "You know how to keep solid with the marquis. As for me, I'm nothing but a country lout, and know nothing about plots or intrigues. If the countess was a scheming, she'd get some sharper wit than I, depend upon it. Some fellow like you, now, that's clever and knowing, and has seen something of the world, eh, Louis?" and Jean poked his companion in the ribs.

The butler chuckled with gratified vanity.

"I believe you're right! Well, good night to you, but don't fall asleep again in the night air or you'll pay for it with rheumatic bones!" and so saying, he was off in the darkness again, whistling softly as he went.

CHAPTER IV.—COTTRELL TAKES TEA WITH THE COUNTESS AND LEARNS MANY STRANGE THINGS.

WHEN the last sound of Louis' footsteps had died away in the distance Jean bolted the door again and darkened all the windows. "Now, my lady, you may safely continue your talk with monsieur, and then I would humbly advise you to get back to the chateau before your absence is discovered."

The girl laughed, and her eyes sparkled as though she enjoyed the novelty of the situation.

"My little protégée, Anne, is keeping guard for me in my room; but, my good Jean, are you sure you will have no more nocturnal visitors. No? Well, then, play the host and give us a bite of supper. Monsieur must be half starved after his journey, and Louis spoke the truth for once, when he said I had no dinner!"

A complete transformation seemed to have taken place in the girl. All her look of dread seemed to have disappeared, and in place of the pallor Cottrell had first noticed, was now a tinge of color.

As for himself, strange events had followed one another in such rapid succession that utter bewilderment had given place to a feeling of almost stony indifference, and he now resigned himself to what might follow with a calmness that would have puzzled himself to explain.

When the frugal little meal was over the countess turned toward Cottrell suddenly and said: "Monsieur, I am writing a novel. I have sketched out the opening chapters, but how to end the story I have not yet decided, and I need your help. I will give you roughly the plot as far as I have developed it."

That a beautiful young countess, meeting him for the first time in a peasant's cottage at eight o'clock at night, should choose this opportunity to

discuss the writing of a novel, was, to say the least, a most unusual situation. But, as I have said, Cottrell had by this time ceased to be astonished at anything. He simply bowed his head to show that he was all attention.

The girl sat for a moment looking fixedly before her, and knitting her brow as though undecided how to begin. When she did speak, it was in a low, tremulous voice, in which were mingled many emotions.

"The heroine of my story," she commenced, "is a young French girl, an orphan, of property. She is only twenty years old, and as, until her nineteenth birthday, she lived in a convent, she is very ignorant of the world, and is without friends save those she left within the convent walls. Her guardian is an uncle, a retired army officer, who is as powerful socially and politically as he is unscrupulous, and his great ambition in life is that his ward shall marry his son, for his own estates are badly encumbered, and hers are vast and valuable.

"Unfortunately for his little scheme, the girl detests her cousin, who is a despicable, selfish wretch. Acting on his father's cue, he makes frequent and ardent love to her, only to find himself repulsed each time.

"Failing on this tack, the two schemers try another. By systematic persecution they make her life miserable in the hope that she will finally give in to their base desire. Most of the servants in the chateau where she lives in lonely state are in their pay to keep a close watch on her and report everything she does. She is a prisoner in everything but name, and so the poor little bird in her gilded cage finds that her spirit is all but broken. She would try travel but that her uncle, in the character of guardian, insists on accompanying her wherever she goes, and that is not to be endured. She would appeal to the law, but she knows in France that would be useless; for what could she prove, and is not her uncle all powerful?

"The girl, in her desperation, decides that she must seek aid from the outside. One day it occurs to her that she ought to have a tutor, as she is desirous of perfecting herself in English; moreover, having a turn for literature, she decides that an English secretary is exactly what she needs. And who knows, thought the lonely, unhappy girl, but that he might prove to be her knight errant—her deliverer?

"But how was she to be sure that the negotiations (confined, as they must necessarily be, to mere correspondence) would result in her securing the services of the right sort of a man—a man who is both brave and chivalrous and in every sense a true gentleman?

"Then this girl, who is fast learning to make use of her wits, has an inspiration. She hits upon the plan of requiring all applicants to send their photographs."

Here Cottrell started with an exclamation on his lips, but the girl motioned to him not to interrupt.

"By these photographs, thinks she, I will be able to form some idea of their true characters. She makes her choice from the great batch sent. Her secretary arrives, and the moment she sees him face to face and hears him speak, she feels that indeed her choice is the right one. And now, Monsieur Henri Cottrell, I must leave it for you to decide whether the lonely little

French girl of my story finds in her secretary the friend and adviser she so sorely needs!"

As the countess finished her tale, which Cottrell had early guessed was the narrative of her own life, she stood up and looked at the young man with eyes that searched his face as a prisoner at the bar will scan the face of the judge for some sign of hope.

The sad cadence of her voice and the quiet dignity of her manner had inexpressibly touched the heart of the handsome young American.

He did not stop to reason, but instinctively he felt that all the countess had told him was true. And then, overcome by the glamour of his strange surroundings, transferred in two days from the prosaicness of modern London to all the romantic atmosphere of the middle ages, he stepped forward and dropping on one knee before the erect, stately figure of the young girl, he took her soft little hand in his and kissed it reverently.

"There, my countess!" he said, smiling brightly up at her, "I have taken the oath of allegiance; I am now the queen's bodyguard, and in life unto death you will find me ever faithful!"

The face of Marie de Villiers grew rosy; her lips trembled, and the tears glistened in her eyes.

"Monsieur," she said, in a broken voice, "you have made me so happy!"

My readers may smile cynically to themselves over this little scene, as having a touch of the theatric, but young and ardent people, under the stress of great emotion, will often do things that, viewed in the light of calm after days, will seem both foolish and far fetched.

Jean had been a passive spectator of the touching little scene, but he now gave an apologetic cough and reminded the countess that it was getting late, and that the chateau would soon be bolted and barred for the night.

"Ah, yes, Jean, you are right!" she replied. "I will go at once."

"He is my one faithful subject!" she added, turning to Cottrell with a pathetic little smile. "He and my protégée, Anne, are all I dare confide in. So I warn you that in allying yourself with my small band, you will be fighting against desperate odds, as opposed to the marquis, my uncle!"

"I would not change sides if there were a thousand marquises!" he retorted, smiling valiantly back at her.

And so they parted; for it was decided that Cottrell should spend the night in Jean's cottage and present himself at the chateau next morning, in the character of the secretary.

In their necessarily brief and hurried interview Henry had not found occasion to mention to the countess his adventure in the railway carriage, nor, indeed, had it even entered his mind to do so, so completely was that incident overshadowed by the events of the last hour.

CHAPTER V.—THE TALL LIEUTENANT AGAIN.

THE Chateau de Frenoir stands on quite an eminence, with a fine sweep of lawn (cut up by walks and fountains all laid out in the stiff French way) rolling gradually up towards it.

Immediately in front of the chateau, which is of the Louis XIV period of architecture, is a broad, marble tiled court, approached by a few broad steps and flanked on either side by marble balustrades. The hand of the landscape gardener is everywhere visible, to allow of a splendid view of the sparkling blue water that stretches out to the horizon. The trees are trimmed in strange fantastic shapes and statues of glistening marble dot the close cropped lawn in every direction.

In sharp contrast to this artificial landscape is the moss covered ruins of a medieval castle, to the right of the chateau, its grim walls and main portal still standing. As a background to all are the lofty Pyrenees, their snow capped peaks piercing the blue ether above.

Henry Cottrell noticed all these things as he made his way along the gravel path and up the marble steps that led to the stately home of the Countess Marie de Villiers.

Having had a few hours for calm reflection regarding his present position, he had come to the conclusion that there was undoubtedly a lot of trouble in store for him. He had made no plans as to what his course of conduct should be; coming events must decide that.

Louis, the butler, answered his ring, and his customary look of placid indifference gave way to open mouthed astonishment at the appearance of this young foreigner, luggage in hand.

"Please tell your mistress, the Countess Marie, that her private secretary has arrived and awaits her pleasure!" Cottrell spoke in a nonchalant tone as he entered the reception room.

He had an hysterical desire to laugh at the expression on Louis' face; at his own formal speech; at the whole situation—it was so unreal—so absurd. It seemed to him as though he were an actor in a play, and he almost expected to see the curtain rung down and to hear the applause of the audience beyond.

"Pardon me, monsieur," said the butler, "but did you say that you are the private secretary to the countess?"

"I did!" was the curt reply.

"That's very strange, monsieur. I have had no word of your coming."

"Probably your mistress has something better to do than to gossip with her servants."

The butler darted a venomous look at the newcomer, but he said no more and shuffled quickly out of the room.

"Friend Louis wanted to pump me," thought Cottrell. "I suppose by tonight the noble marquis will have learned of my arrival!"

Presently the servant returned. "You will find *mademoiselle la comtesse* with her cousin, Count Rignault, on the eastern terrace, back of the chateau," was his report.

"But shall I not be intruding?"

"No, monsieur, you are asked to join them at once. *Monsieur le comte* has heard of you and is very anxious to make your acquaintance!" and Louis put a hand to his mouth to conceal an evil smile.

As the young American went to obey the summons, the butler wagged

his head after him. "You'll soon have your wings clipped, my fine young bird!" he murmured to himself.

The countess was standing before her cousin, her head thrown haughtily back. Her cheeks were fairly aflame with some repressed indignation, and one little foot was tapping violently on the path.

As for the count, his attitude was one of supreme insolence. He was in riding costume, and his hands held behind him carried a thick crop.

As Cottrell quietly approached he heard a strangely familiar voice say in a threatening tone: "So you chose to engage him without consulting either your guardian or myself? I give you fair warning we shall find some means to get rid of him!" The count turned at the sound of approaching footsteps, revealing to the secretary the face and figure of René, the tall lieutenant!

It would be difficult to say which of the two men was the more astonished at the meeting. Cottrell, however, kept his countenance, while the Frenchman grew almost black in the face. His right hand gripped tightly the riding crop, and Henry braced himself for the attack that seemed inevitable.

The poor countess gazed from one to the other in abject terror.

*Suddenly the count threw his crop on the ground and burst out laughing. It wasn't a pleasant sound. It had in it a tone of malignant triumph that grated sorely on the ears of the two.

"A most curious coincidence, *ma belle cousine!*" he exclaimed. "I took your secretary for a fellow who assaulted me in the railway carriage yesterday; see"—and he raised his hat, revealing an ugly wound across his forehead. "Though the resemblance is startling, I now see that this gentleman is not the man!"

And he bowed low to the astonished Cottrell, but his eyes told only too plainly the fierce hatred of the man.

Why did he deny that the American was the man who had knocked him down? Why did he not denounce him at once and call on the servants to seize him and send for the police?

Cottrell was soon to know.

"*Ma chere cousine,*" went on the count, showing his teeth in what was meant to be a gracious smile, "I should very much like a few words in private with your secretary."

The countess hesitated. "It would be best, I think," said Cottrell gravely, and Countess Marie retired toward the chateau.

"Now!" began the lieutenant in an airy manner, "it is just as well that we should come to an understanding at once! I know why my cousin has engaged you. I have read her advertisement in the *London Times*. Ah, be sure I know everything that is going on here—and of course I know why you have accepted. You are, of course, a bit hard up, eh? Ah! I thought so. In such a position as you now hold there is lots to be made; lots of opportunity for filling one's purse. The countess is young, beautiful, and lonely; also very impressionable. You are big and dashing and good looking, and you probably say to yourself that there is a possibility—yes, even a good chance—of one day becoming lord and master here. It is a glorious prospect, is it not?" And Rignault grinned sneeringly at the American.

Cottrell made no attempt to interrupt the count's graceful flow of words. Nor did the expression on his face change.

"Why don't you call me an adventurer and be done with it?" he asked drily.

"Oh, I never call names!"

"Now, that we understand each other," continued Henry, "you might explain what you want of me?"

"I call that sensible!" exclaimed the other. "You are as straightforward in your manner as you are with your fist! As the matter stands between us, I can have you lodged in prison for a year or more if I choose. So you see you are in my power!" The count uttered these last words with vicious emphasis, as though he enjoyed the knowledge, as no doubt he did, for his head still ached.

"Now, supposing I choose to ignore that little episode in the railway carriage, you would consider yourself very much indebted to me, would you not?"

"I should consider myself much more indebted to you for an opportunity to meet you again in less contracted quarters!" remarked Cottrell significantly.

The other's face darkened. "Some other time, my friend, some other time—but it won't be with fists!" he added grimly.

"The question of importance to me just now is: If I save you from the dirt and darkness of a French prison, will you serve me? Will you still remain ostensibly in the service of my cousin, but at the same time work for me? Of course," he added quickly, "I shall make it worth your while. And remember this"—warningly—"if you agree, there will be no playing me false. I have spies about, and the moment you are suspected of double dealing, I will have you nicely jailed before you know where you are!"

Through all the count's talk Cottrell had been thinking deeply on the situation. He knew that to decline outright the villainous offer would be to condemn himself; or even if he managed to escape, he would then leave the countess in the clutches of the scheming pair, who would treat her worse than ever. He quickly made up his mind that he would pretend to lend a willing ear to the lieutenant's proposal and trust to luck and his own wits to circumvent his villainy.

"Come, come, monsieur!" cried Count Rignault. "How do you decide?"

"That's easy!" replied Cottrell, with an air of assumed nonchalance. "I prefer to remain at large!"

"Sensible fellow! Capital, capital!" cried the count, clapping him on the shoulder, and they went off arm in arm toward the chateau, like the best of friends, though only the wish to temporize prevented them from flying at each other's throats.

As they moved away there was a slight motion of the box hedge near the spot where they had stood as they conversed; and then the stiff, wiry branches were shoved cautiously aside, and the head and shoulders of Jean Daron appeared to view.

He watched until the two men had disappeared indoors, then slowly and carefully he crawled out from his hiding place and made off to his cottage.

"So Monsieur Cottrell," he muttered to himself, "you desert the countess! You are nothing but an adventurer, after all—you, with your smooth voice and your fine speeches. We have enough spies around here already. Tonight, Monsieur Cottrell, you will have to reckon with Jean Daron!"

CHAPTER VI.—A MIDNIGHT MEETING.

ABOUT four o'clock of that same day the count took his departure for his own home, some twenty miles distant. As he galloped off on his fine chestnut steed he looked every inch a soldier.

"A gallant gentleman to serve and a liberal one!" remarked Louis to Cottrell, as they stood by the door watching the departing horseman. Then he added in a lower tone: "The count tells me you are one of us."

"Yes, I've become one of the merry band!" replied the American with a queer smile that the other misunderstood.

"That's what we are!" chuckled the butler, tipping him a wink.

Cottrell decided to encourage the fellow's familiarity, thinking to get some information from him.

"I suppose you are a most valuable man to the count!" he remarked with subtle flattery.

"I guess you are about right, monsieur!" replied the gratified Louis. "But useful as I am, there's one more useful!"—here his voice dropped to a whisper—"and that's Anne Trevoir, the protégée of the countess!"

This was startling news to Cottrell, considering what her mistress had told him regarding the girl's fidelity.

"You see she tries to be loyal to the countess," continued Louis; "but much as she cares for her, there is one she cares for more. The foolish young thing has conceived *le grand passion* for the lieutenant, and he humors her and makes out that he cares a lot for her, and in that way keeps control of the girl. She's nothing but a tool in his hands. Why, monsieur," went on the butler in an awed voice, "there's something uncanny in the power he seems to exert over her!"

"The poor countess!" thought Cottrell; "if the knowledge of this came to her it would about break her heart." Then aloud he said: "But what need has the lieutenant of the poor girl when he has such zealous workers as you around him?"

The butler wagged his head knowingly. "Ah, that's the lieutenant's secret," he replied. "But I think I can give a pretty good guess!" he added cunningly. "You see Count Rignault is a high liver, and his income does not satisfy his expensive tastes.

"I know from what I have heard that he is heavily in debt to many of his army friends. Not to pay them would be a terrible disgrace. His father, the marquis, can't help him out. Now Anne will do anything he asks of her. He knows that she has the absolute confidence of the countess, and also that she, Anne, knows where all the family jewels and plate are kept.

"Now, monsieur, I make no charges, but you are clever enough, I am sure, to put two and two together! There is only one way the count can get help, and he is not a man to stop at any trifle!"

"It can't be possible!" muttered Cottrell, astonished beyond measure at this revelation.

"Monsieur, I assure you it is!" retorted Louis, delighted at the impression his words had made; for, like all people of his class, gossip was the joy of his soul. "And if you want further proof, watch Mademoiselle Anne at dinner tonight, for she always dines with her mistress, and I have orders to lay a cover for you as well. If she is nervous and *distract*, depend upon it something is afoot for this evening, probably a clandestine meeting with Lieutenant Rignault; follow her and you will see that all I have told you is true. I would like to join you in the sport of watching the pair of them!" he added with a villainous chuckle, "but I have a little meeting of my own tonight!"

Here was a new development. Cottrell wanted to be alone that he might set his wits to work as to how he might best meet this fresh difficulty. But before he parted with his companion there was one thing more he wished to learn.

"What sort of a man is the marquis?" he inquired.

"A sour tempered old boy, with one foot in the grave," was the disrespectful answer. "He's a meddling old fool. His one ambition now is that the Countess Marie shall wed her cousin, the lieutenant, and thus unite the houses. My own opinion is that if the old codger hadn't had so much to say in the matter, the marriage would have taken place long ago. Count Rignault is such a masterful fellow and so dashing in his manner; and that style always appeals to the women.

"However, the countess is different from most of her sex, and has tremendous pride, and so, perhaps, she never would have taken to Lieutenant Rignault. Still," the loquacious Louis went on, "the old marquis hasn't mended matters with his overbearing way towards his ward. He's made her life miserable enough. It's a wonder she's stood it as long as she has. Lucky for her, the old tyrant can't bother her for some time to come;" and the butler chuckled.

"How so?" asked Cottrell sharply, so sharply that his companion looked at him with surprise.

"I guess I've told you enough. If *monsieur le comte* knew I'd been gossiping with you there would be the devil to pay," and so saying he started off.

But Cottrell was not going to let him go till he had secured the information he desired.

"Come, come, friend Louis," he said pleasantly; "it's a mean trick to rouse a man's curiosity and then leave it unsatisfied."

"Well, what do you want to know?" asked the other shortly.

"What ails the marquis?"

"He's laid up with an attack of gout that will keep one foot off the ground for a good two weeks yet," was the answer that made Cottrell's heart thump for very joy. It meant one less villain to deal with.

Undoubtedly the marquis would dictate his plans to his son, to be car-

ried out during his enforced seclusion, but the American already knew the count well enough to know that he would carry out his own schemes and these only.

But now undoubtedly a time for action had come. The poor, weak, infatuated Anne was a worse menace than even the villain Rignault or that treacherous, snake-like butler.

A sudden idea came to Cottrell that sent the warm blood surging exultingly through his veins. Suppose the count were to do some deed that night of a compromising nature, which he, Cottrell, should witness? Then, indeed, would they be quits, and the incident of the railway carriage no more a menace to him; Cottrell could defy the count.

To track the girl Anne was to Cottrell a most disagreeable duty, but he decided that for the sake of the countess it would be a necessary precaution.

Just before dinner was announced he wrote a long letter to Struthers, telling him everything that had happened.

"And now, friend Dick," he concluded, "if you can take a run over in the Albatross I shall be awfully glad to see you. The countess is badly in need of reinforcements. I can fight in the open as long as I have a leg to stand on, but the treachery and plotting going on around here, you would be more able to cope with than I. Matters will undoubtedly shortly reach a climax, so if you can come, come as soon as possible. You will have no trouble to land, as the beach is good." And then followed minute directions as to the exact spot at which to effect a landing.

Cottrell looked for Daron, that he might give him the letter to mail, but he was nowhere to be found, so he had to trust his missive to an under gardener, who was bound for Turonne that very evening to get some supplies.

Now this man was one of the count's hirelings, and he had not the slightest intention of mailing the letter, for Rignault's instructions were that every letter should be delivered over to Louis, who read them and then, if harmless, they were sealed up again and posted.

Fortunately for Cottrell, the man became drunk as a lord at Turonne, and the letter found its way somehow into the gutter, where it was discovered by a benevolent passerby and promptly mailed.

Anne Trevoir proved to be a pale faced girl with large, pathetic eyes, and Cottrell, watching her narrowly at dinner, noticed that she was nervous, and every time her gaze met his, she looked quietly away, while her fingers were never still.

Her manner was certainly enough to arouse suspicion, and dinner through, after a few minutes' talk with the countess, Cottrell excused himself. He went out on the front terrace for a smoke, where he could command a sweeping view of all paths that led to the beach.

Fearing the light of his cigar might be seen, he threw it away; then hiding himself in the shadow of a pillar, he waited and watched.

Cottrell imagined it must have been close on eleven o'clock when he heard a slight stir on one side of the chateau, and then the faint shadow of a figure was dimly seen hurrying off towards the beach.

Without a moment's hesitation, the young American went quickly in pur-

suit. Beyond the lawn the way led through a stretch of heavy undergrowth, and the path was devious and at some places very narrow; careful as he was, his foot would occasionally light on a dry twig or would crunch noisily upon some pebbles. At each sound the shadowy figure that he kept ever in sight would look over its shoulder in a frightened way, though not before Cottrell had quickly stepped back into the shrubbery.

The distance by this winding path was a good half mile, and he traversed a little over half the distance when he suddenly became aware that he was being followed.

"Humph!" thought he, "I am both pursuer and pursued! Who the deuce can be after me?"

It was a most disquieting state of affairs. He could catch no sight of his invisible follower, nor was he distinctly conscious of any sound of pursuit, but for all that he knew perfectly well that some one was dogging his footsteps.

Cottrell had not lived out West in his younger days for nothing, and he was more or less familiar with Indian tactics. So suddenly quickening his pace, he forged ahead till he came to a turn; once around it, he quickly dived into the underbrush, and crawling on his hands and knees, doubled on his tracks for about twenty yards and waited close to the edge of the path.

He had begun to think that perhaps he was wrong in his surmise when there was audible a faint patter patter, and then before him passed quickly the bent, cautious figure of a man. Cottrell could hear him pant with the exertion of his rapid gait.

The fellow had come and was gone so quickly in the darkness, that Cottrell had not time to discover who he was. But what riveted his attention and almost froze the blood in his veins, was an object the man carried.

It was a long, sharp, shining knife. "Whoever you are, my friend," mused Henry, as he once more continued his walk towards the beach, "I much prefer to have you in front of me than in the rear, especially now that I know what you carry!"

By this time both figures were lost to his sight, and Cottrell had to trust to luck and his own caution that he might come up with the one and escape the attention of the other.

Once through the thicket, the American was obliged to cross a stretch of level, sandy turf, which ended in a series of sand dunes that ran parallel to the beach. These were covered with long, hairy grass. The dunes either rose sheer from the beach, or were partly hollowed out by the action of the surf at high tide.

Cautiously Cottrell made his way to one of these mounds of sand. It was a very dark night, but there was enough light, he knew, for him to be seen outlined against the sky.

When he had come to the dunes he threw himself flat on the ground, and glided along through the long grass till he reached the edge; then he looked cautiously over.

Surely his lucky star was in the ascendant that night, for there, just below him, and so near he could have touched their heads with his hand—were Count Rignault and Mademoiselle Anne Trevoir.

It was a trying situation for the eavesdropper. The slightest noise would have betrayed his presence, and he scarcely dared to breathe.

The girl was fumbling at her pocket. She gave a slight cry.

"It's gone, René!" she murmured then in a despairing whisper.

"Damnation!" muttered the count. Springing forward he grasped her roughly by the wrist and glared into her face. "You are not trying to play me false, are you?" he hissed in her ear.

"Oh, René, don't!" moaned the girl; "you hurt me!"

"Find me those jewels, or I'll hurt you worse!" muttered the other; almost beside himself with baffled hope.

"Oh, René!" cried Anne, "is that your love? Is that your reward for all I have done for you, all that I have suffered for your sake?"

"It's no time to talk about love!" rejoined the other brutally. "I must have those jewels or I am ruined! Do you hear, girl—ruined!"

Of a sudden Anne, who had cowered away from him, stood up and peered into her companion's face.

"René," she said in a voice that had suddenly grown hard and cold, "you don't love me at all; I have been blind—blind in my own conceit; I see now, it was only for what you could get out of me that you professed to care for me! Oh, what a fool—what an ungrateful wretch I have been!"

"Anne, *ma chère*! you must not talk like that!" murmured the count, with an attempt at tenderness, for he saw he had gone too far. "I spoke unkindly, but in my bitter disappointment I forgot myself."

"And in so doing, you revealed your true self!" was the stinging retort.

Just then the girl's foot touched something hard that jingled. Like a flash she had stooped and picked it up.

"What's that?" asked the count.

"The jewels!"

"Ah! hand them over; I'm in a hurry!"

"No!" The woman's voice, though low, was clear and sharp.

The count looked at her in angry amazement.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that these jewels shall be replaced where they belong. Thank God, my eyes are open at last, before I have done this irreparable wrong to my benefactress!"

With an oath Count Rignault sprang at the girl. Cottrell thought it was time to interfere and he gathered himself up for a leap.

There was a slight noise behind him, but he was too engrossed to notice it. A figure suddenly rose out of the long grass, and in an instant a glistening blade was raised in the air directly over him; for a moment it hung motionless, as though the man were taking careful aim before it should descend on its victim.

CHAPTER VII.—COTTRELL DEFIES LIEUTENANT RIGNAULT.

As the knife still hung poised over him, Cottrell, with a spring like a panther, hurled himself upon the broad back of Count Rignault and bore him to

the ground. A fierce scuffle, and the American had the other on his back, his knees grinding into the Frenchman's chest, one hand at his throat, and the other pointing a revolver at his temple.

"Move and you are a dead man," said Cottrell, as calmly as his panting lungs would allow.

The count's hands went up over his head in token of his surrender.

The girl Anne still lay sobbing and moaning upon the sand.

"Now, my dear count," continued Henry, gazing upon the lieutenant's prostrate form, "you will remember asking me if I would serve you or serve time. You will also remember that my answer was that I preferred to remain at large. I now add that I also defy you, Count Rignault, and beg to point out that you are now in *my* power. Your little interview with Mademoiselle Anne I overheard, and your villainous conduct would cause you to be drummed out of the army and be disgraced for life if it became known."

The count's eyes glowed like living coals in the semi darkness, but he remained silent, for what could he say?

"Monsieur," said Anne, suddenly sitting up, "I hear some one coming."

"It is I, Jean Daron," interposed a voice, and the fat figure and impassive face of the little Frenchman appeared.

"Ah, Daron, I'm glad you have come," said Cottrell, without taking his eyes off his prisoner. "As I pounced upon my friend, here, I heard something in the long grass behind me, on top of the sand dune. I wish you would reconnoiter. It would be awkward if the count had any allies about."

"It was I back of you," replied Jean calmly.

"You! What were you doing up there?"

"I was tracking you—I meant to kill you," was the astounding reply, delivered as though it were the most natural assertion in the world.

"Jean Daron, what do you mean?"

"I overheard this morning your acceptance of the count's proposal to serve him. I thought you were a traitor to the countess, so I determined to rid her of you. I see now you were only playing a part. I am glad I did not succeed in my attempt."

Cottrell shuddered at his narrow escape. Yet he could not but admire the dog-like devotion to his mistress of this inscrutable little man. He seemed animated by only one emotion, namely, that he must defend her at all hazards.

He was a strange combination of shrewdness and simplicity. When occasion demanded it, he was a consummate actor, his expressionless face being but a mask to hide his true cunning; when it came time for action he was as relentless as a wild animal that follows its unerring instinct.

"As long as he lives," thought the American, "the countess will not be quite defenseless."

"There is no danger of an attack," observed Jean. "I have looked carefully around."

"I think that is likely," rejoined Cottrell. "*Monsieur le comte's* errand was of such a nature that he would not care for witnesses, even of his own party; and now, Jean, please assist Mademoiselle Anne to the chateau; she is much exhausted by what she has been through."

"Ah, I never can face the countess again," moaned the girl, "after what I have done."

"Yes, you can," said Cottrell kindly; "you bravely redeemed yourself by your defiance of Lieutenant Rignault. On his head is the blame for all this miserable business."

There was a slight movement on the part of the count, as though he wished to speak to the girl.

"Keep quiet and hold your tongue," growled Cottrell. "The girl has broken with you for good and all. Nothing you can say will make her soften towards you. She now knows you for what you are." Then turning to Anne he added gently: "Confess all to the Countess Marie, and she will not only forgive you, but she will also continue to be your best friend."

After considerable urging the sobbing creature was at last induced to go with Jean to the chateau, leaving Cottrell and his prisoner alone upon the beach.

"Probably the best thing for all concerned," remarked Cottrell blandly, "would be to shoot you here and now and bury you in the sand, that the incoming tide will soon cover. Such an ending is too good for you, but it would be the easiest and best method of getting rid of one of the biggest scoundrels that I have ever had the pleasure of meeting."

The count made no reply, probably because he was afraid that he could not control his own tongue, which would have been awkward, seeing the other still held his revolver cocked. But the devilish glint of his eyes, and the sharp quivering of his nostrils were sufficiently eloquent in testifying to the state of his feelings.

"However, it is not my intention to play the part of executioner," went on Cottrell; "I will give you a chance for your life. You and I will fight it out on equal terms—swords or pistols, whichever you choose."

"Now—tonight?" asked the count, trying in vain to conceal his eagerness.

Cottrell smiled.

"I am not quite such a fool as that. No, the affair is to be perfectly regular, according to rules and with seconds. I don't choose to trust myself *alone* to your honor!"

The count winced.

"You think I would attempt to take unfair advantage of you if there were no witnesses? Do you take me for a common cutthroat?"

"Oh, I never call names," quoted Cottrell.

The count shrugged his shoulders—not a very successful operation, for his hands were still over his head.

"You can say what you like; you have the upper hand."

"*Monsieur le comte*, after I have defined your position, you are at liberty to go. As long as you cease your hostilities, I will make no move. But the moment you attempt to make trouble for the countess, or annoy her in any way, I will have you arrested for attempted theft. As you know, there were two witnesses to the affair."

"Mademoiselle Anne is not likely to incriminate herself."

"When the whole affair is explained, not even a French court of justice would hold the woman responsible."

"When and where is the duel to come off?"

"Here, on any night you shall name. Send me a note stating hour and weapons, and you will find me promptly on hand; and now, pardon me, but I must search you for concealed arms, and then you may depart."

The count submitted with as good a grace as he could, and then, rising from the ground, he walked rapidly away in the darkness, and Cottrell heard the whinny of a horse and the thud, thud of hoofs, as he galloped off down the hard beach.

CHAPTER VIII.—COTTRELL MAKES A RESOLVE.

As Cottrell passed up the broad stairway of the chateau that night, or rather early morning, for it was just 1:00 A. M., he was met at the first landing by the countess herself, her face pale as death, her eyes shining with a feverish brilliancy.

"Thank God, you have come back safe," she murmured, as soon as his tall figure appeared slowly mounting the steps, and then as the light of the hall lamp fell on him, she uttered a little cry.

"Oh, *mon Dieu*, you are hurt!" and she fell a trembling.

And no wonder, for he certainly presented a sorry spectacle. His mastery of the lieutenant had not been accomplished without considerable damage to his attire, and there were one or two cuts about his face that looked rather ghastly in the dim light of the hall.

"A scratch or two, that's all," he said, quite gaily. "Nothing to amount to anything, really."

He felt in unusually good spirits, for he had done a very good evening's work.

The countess was not satisfied, however, with making light of his wounds; with gentle imperiousness, she insisted that he lie down on a lounge in an alcove of the vast hall, and with her own soft hands she fetched a basin of water and some linen, and bathed and dressed the cuts on his forehead.

Cottrell tried to remonstrate with her. The poor fellow was visibly embarrassed at her gentle ministrations.

"You are too good," he murmured.

"And mayn't I even do this little in return for your devotion to me?" she asked, smiling archly at him.

"I have only done what any *man* would have done in my place," he protested.

"Ah, *monsieur*, like all noble men, you are too modest. Anne, poor child, has told me all that happened tonight, or at least, all that happened until she left. Is the count, my cousin, now at large?"

"Yes, but I don't think he will be likely to trouble you again."

The girl shook her head sadly.

"I'm afraid you don't know his nature as well as I do. He will find some way of revenging himself."

"I have no doubt he will try," replied Cottrell, cheerfully. "But he will find it a pretty hard task, for the shadow of the jail hangs over him as a result of tonight's work."

He thought it was just as well not to mention to the countess the arrangements for a duel. It would only increase her anxiety.

"Oh, monsieur, I wish I had never drawn you into this miserable affair. It were better if I had fought it out alone, or ended my unhappy life, rather than have endangered the life of a generous stranger."

The girl seemed suddenly to have been seized with remorse for her conduct in inducing Cottrell to lend her his aid, as well as with dark forebodings for the future. Her nerves had been unstrung by the suspense of waiting for his return and by the shock she had sustained when he finally appeared, torn and bloody.

And she now beseeched him wildly to leave her to her fate and escape from the count's clutches while there was yet time.

He did his best to soothe her. He told her that though she ordered him away, he would not go, but would stand guard over her as long as he lived.

She smiled hysterically through her tears at this extravagant protestation.

"'Tis no longer the Countess Marie de Villiers who is master here, but Monsieur Cottrell, I perceive. Well, be it so. I am only a woman, and if you won't go, I can't make you." And then she suddenly smiled brightly at him. "Of course, I knew you wouldn't leave me. It would have broken my heart if you had."

"My dear countess," said he, looking steadfastly up at her, "my life has not been a very happy one. But since I have been in your service I have been more than happy. I ask for nothing better in life than to serve you."

The countess had been standing near the head of the lounge bathing Cottrell's hot temples with some cooling lotion. She now placed two soft fingers on his lips.

"Hush!" she said quickly, "you must not talk like that."

Henry looked quickly up in her face. "You are not angry with me, my countess?" he asked anxiously.

"Angry with you! How could I be?" exclaimed Marie, looking down at him with great eloquent eyes. The next instant she was gone.

For a long time Cottrell lay upon the lounge, reflecting on all that had taken place. The intoxication of the girl's presence seemed still to hang about him; he seemed to feel the touch of her fingers, and even as it thrilled him with a new and delightful sensation, he bitterly reproached himself.

"You're a villain, Henry Cottrell!" he said, "and what is even worse, you are a fool! How dare you act in the romantic, sentimental way you have towards that young girl! You have played upon her sympathies so that she has done that which she is now sorry for!"

No man of less fine sensibilities would have thus reproached himself for his course of conduct. But Cottrell, with an instinct almost feminine in its keenness, realized that the young countess, hungering for human sympathy and love, had responded to his chivalrous attention and loyal devotion with the pathetic gratitude of a lonely child.

For, after all, she was not much more than a child, either in years or in a knowledge of the world. Realizing this, he felt it would be contemptible on his part to take advantage of his position and her loneliness to win her love.

He resolved then and there that in the future his attitude towards the countess must be one of respectful solicitude, as that of a loyal servant; that he must avoid her company whenever possible; and that anything like friendly intercourse for pleasure's sake must be strictly tabooed. He told himself that he must always keep in sight the difference in their stations—that she was his employer and he, to all intents and purposes, her servant.

And even as he made this resolution, he felt a bitter pang, as the sudden and terrible truth dawned on him that he loved Marie de Villiers with an intensity of feeling that he had never dreamed was possible.

He groaned in spirit as he thought of what it would cost him to conceal his passion from her. It never occurred to him that she might love him. Even if he had suspected that she really cared for him, he would have regarded it purely as girlish sentimentality, superinduced by the romantic manner in which they had been thrown together, and as such he was in honor bound not to take advantage of it.

Besides, the girl was an heiress. This, together with the prominence of her family, made her one of the greatest matches in all France, and what right had he to step in, and by virtue of his position, spoil a future—glorious with its possibilities for power and influence—which she was as yet too young and inexperienced to comprehend.

It was part of the innate modesty of the man that he should underestimate his own worth.

His mental attitude in the whole affair was curious. It was as though he were playing a dual rôle, and as protector of the countess (for such he felt himself to be), he refused to look with favor on himself as the lover; for what was he but a penniless adventurer, after all?—though his motives were of the best, and his conscience was clear.

So reasoned Henry Cottrell, till the solemn striking of a distant clock told him it was two in the morning, and time that he retired.

As he wearily mounted to his room, he thought with a sigh that the gates of love were forever locked, and that his secret must go with him to the grave.

But it often happens that the firmest resolution, and the best laid plans of men will be scattered to the four winds by a glance from a woman's eye, or in the heat of sudden emotion.

CHAPTER IX.—THE COUNT HAS AN INSPIRATION.

WHEN Count Rignault rode away, after his encounter with Cottrell, and his unsuccessful attempt to raise funds through his former tool, Anne Trevoir, he was in no very pleasant frame of mind. In all that dark, lonely ride to his home he had nothing to occupy his thoughts but the exasperating and humiliating happenings of the last hour. He bitterly cursed the ill luck that had brought Cottrell upon the scene; that had worked the change in Anne; and that had upset his carefully laid plans generally. In fact he cursed every-

body and everything but himself and his own villainy, as is the way with natures of his sort.

His brief furlough would end in three days, and before that time money must be raised to pay his army debts or sure disgrace awaited him.

Heartily and energetically as the marquis, his father, had aided him in his endeavors to force the Countess Marie to wed him, he dared not tell him of the events of the night and of his attempted theft. Unscrupulous as the old man was and ambitious for his own house, such a low born crime as he had been guilty of would have been unpardonable in the eyes of the marquis, not so much because of the villainy of the thing as because of its imprudence.

Besides, his father did not know the frightful extent of his debts. The lieutenant was too much afraid of his anger to tell him the truth about them.

So the count's plight was well nigh desperate, and he now concentrated all his faculties on a plan to escape from the dilemma in which his own rashness had placed him. Until that night he had been restrained from committing any act that could be construed into a positive crime.

Weak, selfish and ambitious, he had gone step by step in the downward path until now he had thrown all moral responsibility to the four winds, and, like a cornered animal, he looked about for any weapon that would free him of his trouble.

The next morning, pale and haggard from a sleepless night, he presented himself at breakfast. The sharp featured, white haired old marquis, sat in his armchair at the head of the table, his gouty foot looking abnormally large in its linen bandages, propped up on a stool before him.

"You were out late last night, René," remarked his father, looking at him keenly from under his heavy eyebrows. The lieutenant, with a trembling hand, lifted a cup of strong coffee and cognac to his lips before replying.

"I felt a bit restless and out of sorts last evening, *mon père*," he said, "and so I took a good hard gallop along the beach."

"It does not seem to have improved the condition of your nerves. Hello, what is that cut under your left ear?"

The old man leaned forward and looked in his son's face with his bright, searching eyes. "Have you been making a fool of yourself?" he added.

The younger man flushed slightly and moved uneasily in his chair.

"What nonsense! In the darkness I ran too close to a tree, and a jagged end of a branch gave me that scratch."

The marquis accepted the explanation and dropped the subject. Just then his eye caught sight of an official looking envelope that lay, opened, by his plate.

"Oh, by the way, René," he said, "I have just received a communication from the police of Turonne notifying me that a large body of brigands, investing the Pyrenees, have recently been making depredations on the French border. They are composed for the most part of Spanish outlaws, who have of late been driven over this way by the vigilance and aggressiveness of some Spanish mountain troops, who were sent to try to exterminate them. What right have they to foist the villains on us? By my life, René, we may all be murdered in our beds some night!"

"Yes?" said René indifferently. He was thinking of something else than outlaws just then.

"But I tell you it is true!" cried the marquis vigorously. "It is an outrage, and the Spanish government ought to be appealed to in the matter! Why, only last week Monsieur Carrat, the scientist, who lives about twenty miles from here, was attacked by the brigands, his eldest son carried off and held for a fabulous ransom; the payment of it they say has all but beggared poor Carrat!"

"Is it possible?" murmured René politely. His mind was still busy on another matter.

The marquis became a bit exasperated at his son's indifference. "Some day, when they have looted the chateau and carried off your cousin, Marie de Villiers, you will realize the danger of which I tell you. But it will then be too late."

At last René was interested. The strange, startled look he fastened on his father made the old man laugh.

"Ha, ha!" he chuckled. "That makes you start, doesn't it?"

The young man did not answer. He rose abruptly and going to the window gazed out over the green lawn and the foliage of the trees that framed it in, his brain in a whirl. He was filled with wild exultation. Relief from his troubles was at hand, and with it a triumphant revenge on all his enemies.

"Are you trying to see the chateau, to make sure it is still standing?" asked his father with a laugh. He imagined that his son was really anxious about his cousin's safety.

"Oh, that will be safe enough, *mon père*, and I really think there is not the slightest danger of attack. I don't believe the brigands would be so bold as to go so far from their haunts; we, being nearer the mountains, are much more likely to be the recipients of their attentions."

The marquis shook his head.

"Those outlaws are clever fellows. Depend upon it, they have found out the comparatively defenseless condition of the chateau, as well as the great booty to be gathered there, and then there would be the enormous ransom they could obtain by carrying off your cousin! No, no! those fellows are bold enough when the plunder is heavy!"

René shrugged his shoulders. "As long as you feel that way about it, I will ride over to Turonne and ask the police to take all necessary precautions to prevent an attack upon the property of the countess. To show you how little faith I have in the danger we are under, I am going for a two days' hunting trip in the mountains."

The older man glanced at him uneasily. "I hope you won't rashly expose yourself to any danger?"

"Trust me, *mon père*," responded the other, with a queer laugh. "I don't intend to be carried off by brigands. Besides, I am a soldier and ought to know how to take care of myself. My nerves are unstrung, and I think roughing it would do me good."

As he had promised the marquis, Lieutenant Rignault rode over to Turonne that afternoon and asked the prefect of police to send help to his cousin

should there be the slightest cause for alarm. He had his own reasons for this visit as well.

"It will throw the police off the scent," he said to himself. "They would never suspect me of being mixed up with the affair."

"Oh! by the way, *monsieur le comte*," said the prefect, as René was about to ride off, "it's very strange, but we have never discovered the slightest trace of the fellow who assaulted you in the train."

René smiled grimly. "I don't blame you for not catching him," he replied.

That evening about sunset a solitary figure on horseback might have been seen slowly wending its way towards a mountain road leading toward the Pyrenees, and the border line of France and Spain. He was tall and swarthy. His clothes were of a rough and common character, and the great slouch hat set rakishly on his head and adorned with a peacock feather added to his picturesque appearance.

The horse he rode was a tough, wiry little beast, with a shaggy mane; and, like its rider, there was something fierce and wild in its aspect that made a solitary herder they passed on the way cower and cross himself in terror.

The rider noticed the fear he inspired and smiled grimly.

"Good!" he muttered to himself. "He takes me for an outlaw. The brigands will receive me with open arms. And when they know my errand they will call me comrade and brother!"

Something in the situation seemed to arouse a wild humor in the man, and he laughed aloud, waking the echoes of the sleeping hills with the sounds of his discordant mirth. The herder flew down the hillside like one possessed, driving his flock of sheep before him, and calling on all the saints to preserve him from the evil one.

CHAPTER X.—A SIGNAL FROM THE SEA.

WHEN Cottrell joined the countess the next morning in the library, for the ostensible purpose of giving her a lesson in English, he was glad to see that there was no awkwardness in her manner of greeting him, and she made no allusion to the incidents of the night before.

He was greatly surprised, therefore, when in the course of an hour, she suddenly put down her book and looked up at him with that odd mixture of girlish shyness and quiet dignity that was one of her chief charms.

"Monsieur, I am afraid I acted in a way last night that must have seemed unmaidenly in your eyes," she said simply, the rich warm color creeping up over her face and neck. "You see, my life has been so lonely since I came here that when at last I found a true friend, I wanted him to know that I was grateful. Besides, you seemed so much older than I, and so big and protecting, that almost unconsciously I made you fill the place of the father I never knew."

Her voice had grown low and sad. "But I know," she went on, suddenly growing pale, "I had no right to regard you in that light."

Cottrell did not know what to say in the face of her girlish artlessness. It was his turn to blush now.

As for the countess, her state of mind was that of a person who for the first time goes out in the water and finds himself beyond his depth. The poor girl had fallen deeply in love with this handsome, masterful American, but as yet she had not realized the fact.

She only knew that she liked to be in his presence, and that the thought of his being in danger filled her with a deep dread she could not understand.

"My countess, whatever you have done, you did in the goodness of your heart, and as for me, I shall never forget your gracious kindness."

In his fear lest his voice express too eloquently what he really felt, Cottrell spoke almost coldly.

The countess noticed his tone, and she saw in it a veiled reproof.

"I know I have lowered myself in your eyes," she said in a gentle voice that expressed the pain she felt. "But in the loneliness of my lot you must find my excuse."

To have her think he could reproach her, even in his thoughts, was more than Cottrell could endure.

"Do not imagine for a moment that I would presume to upbraid you," he said in a low voice that trembled with suppressed emotion. "You, who are the most noble of women! If my words sounded cold to you it was because I dared not tell you all that I think of you; how much I——"

He broke off suddenly and hurriedly left the room in an agony of fear lest he had revealed his secret.

The countess gazed after him in mute astonishment. Then she smiled happily to herself.

"Poor fellow!" she said softly; "so loyal and yet how bashful he is! He is afraid I will think him presumptuous. Poor fellow!" and she sighed in the way women do when something both pleases and touches them.

And Cottrell's secret was as yet safe.

When Louis announced luncheon, the American looked keenly at him, to note any change in his demeanor that would show that he had been made aware of the new status of affairs, but the butler was as imperturbable as ever, and Cottrell came to the conclusion that he was as yet in ignorance of what had happened the night before.

In this he was wrong, as he was destined to find out.

It was an evening or so later, and Cottrell had strolled out on the front terrace for an after dinner smoke. He half expected a note from the count requesting a meeting on the beach that evening, and he had decided that in lieu of a better one Jean Daron would have to act as his second.

Suddenly he was conscious of a glare in the sky, coming from the direction of the sea, but before he could look that way it was gone. On a sudden he thought of Struthers, and the arrangement he had made for letting him know of his arrival off the coast.

It was to be three rockets at intervals of about thirty seconds. Cottrell gazed into the darkness whence the glare had come. Yes, there it was again. A tall shaft of light, rising high in the air, and then suddenly disappearing. A short interval and the third rocket shot up into the blackness, and then all was dark again.

"It's dear old Struthers," said Cottrell to himself, "and how he must have hustled to get here so soon!"

Then he turned about and hurried to the chateau. Presently he came out again and walked to the beach, taking good care to see that nobody was following him.

He carried a lantern, and once under the protecting sand dunes that screened him from the house, he lit the lantern cautiously and swung it from right to left several times. This performance he repeated three times at short intervals.

Presently out over the water was heard a solitary musket shot.

Cottrell uttered an exclamation of joy. Their prearranged signals had worked perfectly, and now there was nothing for him to do but wait till the captain's gig should land Struthers.

Then, a sudden thought striking him, sent a chill down Cottrell's back. Supposing his letter to Struthers had been delivered up to the count, what would be easier than for him to act on it, and, landing a boat with two or three armed ruffians, seize and carry him off. Such a condition of affairs would account for Struthers' wonderful promptness.

The more Cottrell thought of this possibility the more was he convinced of its likelihood. But supposing that it were Struthers after all?

Cottrell decided that the only thing to do was to meet the boat, and if it contained foes, to trust to the darkness for escape.

Above the moan of the surf could now be heard the creak, creak of oars, and presently Cottrell discerned dimly the outline of a small boat advancing toward the shore. A tall figure was standing in the bow.

"A bit to starboard, captain!" sang out a voice that told Cottrell all was well.

"Steady, boys!" went on the same clear, strong voice. "Ship your oars!"

The next moment a big wave shot the boat up on the beach, four stout fellows sprang over the sides and landed her high and dry before the receding wave could carry her out again.

The next moment the two old friends had clasped hands.

"Henry, old man, glad to see you still alive. Didn't know but what the count had disposed of you by this time!"

"Dick, my friend, I think I have got the upper hand of Count René Rignault."

Struthers shook his head in unbelief. "You never can be sure of having the upper hand of a villain until you have him under lock and key. If you have cornered the man and tied his hands as to his actions in the open, then beware of him. He is more dangerous then than ever, for when he does strike, it will be from an unexpected quarter."

"You take a very gloomy view of the matter," said Cottrell, with a grimace.

"It's always a mistake to make light of the fighting quality of your foe," replied Struthers. "Better go to the other extreme. It's preferable to have your opponent turn out less formidable than you had expected than it is to discover too late that he's more than a match for you."

"Stop croaking," retorted Cottrell with a laugh, "until I have explained

the whole situation to you, and then I will listen with the deepest respect to your words of wisdom."

The American, like many sturdy fellows, conscious of their physical strength and courage, was inclined to laugh at danger, declining to cross bridges until he came to them. But it's a good thing to know beforehand, sometimes, just where the bridges are located. That was the principal Struthers went on; he was no less brave than Cottrell, in his cool, deliberate way, but he believed in reducing danger to a minimum, and then accepted what might follow with all calmness.

These two friends made a splendid team for any adventure; for the good qualities one lacked the other possessed.

Cottrell led Struthers a little distance off from the others, to where they found a log of driftwood beached high by the tide. They seated themselves upon it, and the Englishman was informed of every little detail that had occurred since Cottrell's arrival at the chateau.

"So you see," said the young American, in conclusion, "the count dare not appeal to the police in any case, for fear of the consequences to himself. Nor for the same reason would he dare openly to try to oust me by force. As for the old marquis, nothing is to be feared from that quarter, as he is temporarily laid up with the gout, and knows only what his son chooses to tell him, which isn't everything, you can depend upon it."

"As I understand it, then," remarked Struthers, in his dry, lawyer-like style, "the count desires either his cousin's hand or her death, for in either case he would get what he wanted, namely, her property. Furthermore, being both an unscrupulous and desperate man, he is likely, nay certain, to go to any length to accomplish his purpose. That I take it is the exact situation."

"Yes," assented Cottrell. "That is the situation."

"Then," added Struthers gravely, "you have the most dangerous possible antagonist to deal with. And, moreover, the fact that he is a well known army man and a relation of the Countess de Villiers, while you are nothing but a poor dependent of hers, puts you at a great disadvantage."

"I realize all that," replied Cottrell gloomily, "and the only thing for us to do is to play a waiting game and not let the count take us unawares."

"That is it precisely," put in the Englishman, "and until you know the countess' life or honor to be in danger, you can make no positive move. The count will undoubtedly try to dispose of you by stratagem, thinking then to have a clear field, or else——" Here Struthers paused and looked out over the tossing water.

"Well?" asked Cottrell.

"Or else he will try to kidnap the countess herself, possibly to keep her prisoner under his father's roof. The old boy might easily convince himself, and the civil authorities as well, no doubt, that forcible detention was justifiable. He might put in the plea that she was not morally responsible."

"But what good would that do to the count?" asked Cottrell. "Simply keeping her a prisoner would not pay his army debts."

Struthers turned slowly around on his companion with a grim look on his ordinarily genial face.

"My dear fellow," he said quietly, "once a prisoner, the count will find means to bend the lady to his will. But if he is very impatient, and the process is too slow, he can find that which will rid him of her for good. You have heard of people being poisoned, have you not?"

Cottrell sprang to his feet with a cry of horror. "My God, man! We are not dealing with common cutthroats, nor are we living in the Dark Age!"

"No!" retorted Struthers drily, "but man's nature doesn't change; and a black heart is the same whether its owner wears fine clothes or the rags of an outcast."

CHAPTER XI.—A FACE AT THE WINDOW.

COTTRELL was staggered. Such a possibility as Struthers had just suggested had never occurred to him, and he was lost in admiration of his friend's fertility of imagination at the same time that the idea struck terror to his heart.

"Struthers, I'm glad you have come!" he ejaculated. "I foresee that I should have been a mere baby in the wily hands of the count. I would be perfectly unable to anticipate such plots and scheming. Why, that plan you have just outlined he may be preparing to put into execution this very night!"

"I don't say that the count has concocted any such scheme," put in Struthers; "I only suggest that that would be the easiest way out of his difficulties, and it would very likely occur to him. But whether it has or not, he will not carry it into effect until after his duel with you. French soldiers, who are all dexterous swordsmen, are very punctilious regarding such a matter. Besides, in the count's case, that would be the safest way of getting rid of you; after that it would be comparatively easy to dispose of the two women."

"I don't like the idea of being so disposed of," said Cottrell, making a wry face.

"You can hold your own, I think, in a duel," observed the Englishman. "Your experience at sword practice in the United States militia will stand you in good stead. And if you are still fresh on those few Continental feints I showed you, you ought to come out of the affair with little more than a scratch."

Just then both men started to their feet and instinctively reached for their revolvers, for right above them on the sand dune was heard a smothered exclamation, and then a fierce scuffle. The sounds of heavy panting came down to them, and they made out in the dusk the forms of two men met in a deadly embrace.

They rocked this way and that, in their efforts to gain a mastery each over the other. In the fury of their action, they did not note how near they were to the edge of the dune, and on a sudden they came crashing down at the feet of the two astonished and bewildered spectators.

The young American and his friend separated the combatants, who proved to be Jean Daron and Louis, the butler.

"Daron!" exclaimed Cottrell, "what is the meaning of all this?"

Jean had already recovered his breath, and was the same impassive little fellow as ever.

"That fox!" he replied, fastening his vindictive little eyes on the pale, trembling form of the butler; "that fox came down here to play the spy on you. I got an inkling of what he was up to and tracked him out. He heard me behind him and tried to escape, but I held on to him. He gave me a bad stab, though, with his knife," and Jean held up a bleeding hand, which he proceeded to bind up the best way he could with a handkerchief.

"It's a lie!" cried Louis, still shaking like a leaf; "I swear to you, monsieur, it's a lie! It's just the other way about. Jean is the spy."

"I'm sorry to say I don't believe you," said Cottrell coolly. Then he gave Daron his revolver with which to keep guard over Louis, and drawing his friend aside, he asked his advice as to the disposal of their prisoner.

"He knows too much now to be allowed his liberty. He has already made us trouble enough."

Struthers thought a moment. "I tell you what," he exclaimed. "We'll put him aboard the Albatross, and keep him in irons until after this affair is settled and then land him."

Cottrell approved of this plan, and Struthers blew his whistle, whereupon three of the gig's crew ran up, followed by the captain.

"Take this fellow aboard, captain, and put him in irons," said Struthers, pointing at the butler, who was thunderstruck at the sudden appearance of the sailors.

"Aye, aye, sir!" answered Captain Kent, his merry eyes twinkling as they always did under any excitement.

As the men stepped forward to lay hands on him, Louis flung himself on the ground before Cottrell.

"Don't let them carry me off!" he screamed. "They will murder me."

"Shut up!" growled Struthers, "or we'll have to gag you. You won't be hurt. We are only going to detain you a little while aboard my boat; that's all."

"Oh, monsieur!" pleaded Louis, turning to the American again, "let me free and I will serve you faithfully." A cunning look crept into the corners of his eyes. "You have but to pay me a little bigger wages than the marquis sees to it I have, and I am yours, body and soul."

Cottrell hesitated a moment; he might prove a valuable ally, but what was there to insure his not playing them false in any case? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

"My friend," said Henry contemptuously, "I would not trust you in my sight, let alone out of it. You must go where you will be out of harm's way."

The fellow's sallow face grew suddenly red with rage; his eyes gleamed malignantly.

"I can have you imprisoned for illegally putting me in irons," he hissed. "And once I am free, I will get even with you if it takes to my dying day."

"If you don't have a care," put in Struthers sharply, "you'll find that your dying day has already dawned. Here, Kent, off with him, and shut him up if he bellows."

Louis was shrewd enough to see that resistance was useless, and so, with one parting shot, he went off quietly enough with his captors.

"Monsieur Cottrell," he said, snapping out his words like an angry dog, "you think you are mighty clever, but I give you this word of warning: Lieutenant Count Rignault is one too many for you. Before three days are up you'll be a dead goose."

That's as far as he got, for Kent brought his fist in contact with his jaw with a force that made his teeth rattle.

"Now will you keep a quiet tongue in your mouth!" growled the captain in English. Louis did not understand the words, but he understood the action and in silence they led him away.

"I was just going to suggest something that that fellow Louis has unconsciously hit upon," remarked Struthers, as he and his friend resumed their interrupted conversation, "and that is, to discharge all the men servants at the chateau. Of course, have the countess do the deed, so as to make it legal, and not as coming from any outsider."

"Yes, that would be a good move, I think," admitted Henry, "but what would the countess do about running the establishment? It would not be easy to get a new retinue of servants."

"I have looked out for that," was the reply. "I have brought over a couple that may be depended upon to the last—Peters and his wife—and, besides, I can spare my two stewards—excellent men both. I can get along with the cook and a sailor for cabin boy."

"You intend, then, to stay aboard the Albatross?"

"Most certainly. My presence at the chateau could not be satisfactorily explained. If it got noised abroad, it might create a scandal."

"I see," said Cottrell with a smile, "I am only a nonentity of a secretary, while you are *un gentilhomme*; a most conspicuous figure."

"That's about the size of it, as far as public opinion would go. Then, too, we ought to consider the question of defense. As long as there is a chance of the count's resorting to some desperate measure, we should place a strong guard about the chateau every night. I can spare about eight men, and I think you might do well to place them in charge of that quiet little fellow Daron."

"As for me, I shall cruise off shore during the day, and at dusk anchor as close in as I dare. I will have a boat always ready to launch at a moment's notice, so in case of trouble I can quickly land the remainder of my men—about a dozen. Of course everything should be done to prevent the count or his father from getting wind of my arrival, and of the resources now at your disposal. Thinking that you have practically no forces at all, he may be careless in his plans, and that would be your salvation."

In all of Struthers' suggestions Cottrell acquiesced. He acknowledged the superior judgment and wisdom of the Englishman, who was nothing short of a genius in conducting an adventure. Cottrell, like all Yankees, was shrewd and resourceful, too, but he had not the experience and knowledge in dealing with people like the count that Struthers had, owing to his fondness for detective work, which in England he had indulged in to a certain extent.

"And now," said Struthers, when everything had been arranged for mounting guard and transporting the English servants to the chateau on the morrow, "I should like very much to make the acquaintance of the mistress of the castle. I wish to judge for myself that she is the noble girl you picture her. Much as I trust to your good judgment, Henry, I am well aware that beauty often blinds a man to everything else."

"I am quite willing that you should see for yourself," said Cottrell quietly. "Follow me till we reach the chateau; then I will inform *mademoiselle la comtesse* of your arrival and see that no servants are lurking about."

Cottrell soon returned, and whistled softly to Struthers.

The young Englishman followed the other into a dimly lighted drawing-room, where the young countess was waiting to receive him. Struthers looked keenly at her. The girl's eyes did not fall before his scrutinizing glance, but met his fearlessly. For a full three seconds they stood thus, each mentally taking the other's measure.

"My countess," said Cottrell, "this is my English friend, the Honorable Richard Struthers, who has come to render what assistance he can."

She smiled slightly and held out her hand to Struthers in salutation. He took her fingers in his and bent over them, after the old French fashion. Then he looked up at her with a frank smile. He had already passed judgment on her, and the verdict was all that Cottrell could have wished.

"To be candid with you, my lady," he said in his calm, cheery voice, "I ran over here to see that no harm had befallen my friend, Cottrell. That was my only motive. But now," with a courteous bow, "I feel convinced that had evil overtaken him, he would have fallen in a good cause, and I also beg to be allowed to put myself in your service."

It was a very pretty little speech, and showed the Englishman to be the courtier he was.

"I thank you, monsieur," replied the countess simply, "and for your friend's sake as well as my own, I accept your generous offer."

And so did a bond of union spring up between the three that was never to be broken in life, and it served to keep up their heart of hope when all was black.

The countess was facing the open window by which Cottrell and the Englishman had entered, but the two friends standing opposite the girl had their backs to it. Presently she happened to glance towards this window.

Instantly she became like one transfixed; her great eyes set in terror, her lips parted as though she had started to speak and had been suddenly turned to stone.

Before either of the men could realize what had happened, the spell was broken, and with a half articulate cry she fell senseless across the table in front of her.

CHAPTER XII.—THE ESCAPE.

"My God, what can it mean!" cried Cottrell in an agony of fear. He took up the unconscious form of the girl he loved, and placed her on a lounge,

chaffing her hands and doing his mortal best to bring her back to consciousness again.

Struthers did not answer; his ready wit had guessed the truth. Like a flash he blew out the lamp, only a faint ray of light coming in from the hallway beyond; and quickly and noiselessly he stepped out through the French window, revolver in hand, and looked eagerly about.

He stood still a moment till his eyes should grow accustomed to the darkness without.

A pale new moon glowed faintly in the heavens and served to throw great ghostly shadows from every tree and shrub. His attention was caught by a marble statue a little way out on the terrace. The curious thing about it was that whereas all the other statues scattered about cast but a single shadow, this one seemed to have two, and at right angles to each other.

"Very curious," thought Struthers, as he advanced cautiously towards it. "I wonder if it's an optical delusion, or a freak of nature, or—ah, I thought so!"

The odd shadow had suddenly expanded, and was now flying across the open with what looked suspiciously like a pair of legs.

Without a moment's hesitation, Struthers took aim in the uncertain light and pulled the trigger. There was a flash, a sharp report, quickly followed by a cry of pain, and the flying shadow collapsed.

"Winged him," thought Struthers as he rapidly made his way across the lawn.

But quick as he was, he was too late; the figure got on its feet again somehow and staggered into the shrubbery near by, and was lost to view. It would have been impossible to have tracked the unknown one, for the shrubbery was dense, and covered a considerable area.

Still, the Englishman beat about through the bushes for some moments in the hope that the wounded man might have fallen in his tracks. At last he gave up his search and went back to the house.

He found Cottrell and the girl Anne working over the countess, who was just regaining consciousness. A faint sigh escaped her, and presently she opened her eyes and met the anxious gaze of her secretary.

"What has happened?" she asked faintly. "Why are you all so——" A sudden recollection came to her. "Oh, I remember!" And she fell to shuddering, as though taken with the ague, while at the same time she covered her face with her hands as though to shut out some fearful sight.

Poor Cottrell thought she must be out of her mind, and looked piteously at Struthers.

The Englishman came up to him. "She saw a face at the window, I think," he whispered in his ear. "We must get her to tell us who it was."

"My poor child!" said Cottrell, gently bending over the countess. "The man is gone. There is nothing to fear!"

With an effort the girl controlled her emotion and sat up.

"You must think me a fearful coward," she murmured, a tinge of color in her pale cheeks, "but it shocked me so, it was so unexpected, and the expression on his face so frightful!" and in spite of herself she trembled like a leaf.

"Yes, yes, it was enough to startle any one," said Struthers soothingly; "it was a face at the window, was it not? Yes, I thought so. Who was it?"

"It was Louis, my butler!" said the countess.

"Louis!" gasped the men in chorus. "Oh, surely not! Think again. Was it not the count now?" asked Struthers.

"No!" was the reply. "There is no mistake; it was Louis, and if ever a man looked murder, he did."

"Dick," said Cottrell excitedly, "there is only one explanation, and that is that the fellow has escaped from Kent."

"I am of the same opinion," said Struthers gravely. "It is a thousand pities," he added, "for he will inform the count as to the strength of our forces."

The two men prepared to leave, first telling the countess, who was now more composed, about their plans for a night defense, and for substituting for her French servants the English people Struthers had brought with him. And in all these plans Marie de Villiers heartily agreed.

"I will discharge all the men in the morning," she said. "They will of course appeal to the marquis, but he can make no legal objection, for this is my own house."

They then bade her good night and went at once to the beach. Here they found Kent and the sailors in a great state of mind.

If it had not been for the gravity of the situation, it would have been laughable to witness the chagrin of the English tars over the escape of their prisoner.

"I don't see 'ow 'e hever done it, sir!" said Kent, in humble amazement, racking his brains for a satisfactory explanation, and scratching his head as though to stimulate his thoughts.

"The Frenchy is as slippery as an eel! We bound 'is feet and harms, sir, with rope and put 'im in the bottom of the boat. Thinkin' to save two trips an' bein' desirous of bein' on deck should you want us sudden like, I didn't 'ave 'im rowed to the Albatross, but kept the boat beached till you should be aready to go yerself. 'Fer,' ses Hi to meself, 'you wouldna object to the Frenchy's company for such a short voyage as from 'ere to the yacht.'

"Well, sir," continued the captain, "we kept our weather eye on the oily willain, but being bound, we had no dream as 'ow 'e could cut loose. 'E kep' still, but 'e grooned with hevery breath."

"Never mind all that, Kent," broke in Struthers impatiently; "just tell us how he escaped."

"Hi was jest a comin' to that, beggin' yer pardon, sir. Yer knows, I dare say, that there's a small iron brace up foward in the gig. Well, hit 'as a sharp edge, not rounded like most, an' that son of a gun of a Frenchman jest rubbed and scraped the rope that bound his hands across it till 'e was free; then he fished a knife out of 'is pocket and cut the rope about 'is legs. I knows that cause hin 'is infernal 'urly 'e left the knife be'ind 'im."

"Well?" said Struthers and Cottrell in a breath.

"Well," continued Kent rather shamefacedly, "bein' so sure o' hour prisoner, p'raps we wasn't as watchful as we might a' been. You'd already gone

up to the 'ouse, hand the boys and Hi got into han arg'ment as to 'ow many Frenchmen we could do up apiece, when Billy Watts, the boatswain, shouted out, ' There goes Frenchy! '

" Sure enough, there 'e was, disappearing over a sand dune like as though the devil was after 'im. Well, sir, we tried hour best to catch 'im, but it warn't no use, hand we guve it hup."

Most men in Struthers' place would have given Kent a fearful raking over the coals. But he only looked his captain straight in the eyes and said very quietly: " Kent, I am very sorry this thing has happened—it may do us great harm. I hope it will be a lesson to you to obey orders more strictly in the future, and do less thinking on your own hook."

If Struthers had sworn a perfect volley of oaths at him, Kent could not have taken his remarks more to heart. He blushed under his weatherbeaten skin like a schoolgirl, and fidgeted about from one foot to the other while his employer was speaking. When he had finished and ordered the boat launched, he rushed down to the gig, and for a few minutes the air was blue while the captain gave vent to his overwrought feelings as he issued orders to the crew.

Jean Daron was to have taken charge of the sailors constituting the guard for the chateau, but shortly after his capture of Louis, he had mysteriously disappeared. Cottrell thought nothing of this, for it was quite characteristic of the little fellow to go off on some independent hunt.

Very likely he was on a new scent. Possibly he had gone toward the home of the count to spy on him. The American felt sure that wherever he went or whatever he did, Jean could be depended on to give a good account of himself.

CHAPTER XIII.—DON ALONZO CAVARA.

TOWARDS dusk of the last day of the count's furlough, a band of two to three score rough looking fellows were slowly descending the side of the last ridge of the Pyrenees on the French side.

They were for the most part as wild a looking set of ruffians as could be found in all the continent. There was apparently no semblance of military order in their march or manner, but each fellow swaggered on after his own sweet will, stopping now and then to shoot at a covey of birds as they rose out of the woods, screaming and chattering at the men's approach, or pausing to refresh themselves with a cooling draft from the mountain stream along whose course they were following.

The same absence of uniformity was apparent in their attire. One wore a bolero jacket, knee breeches and round cap of the Spanish toreador (albeit torn and soiled by travel); another had the rough garb of a French peasant; and between these two were all types and grades of dress imaginable.

This motley crew, as diverse in temperament and breeding as in their clothing, was none other than the famous and much dreaded brigand band of Don Alonzo Cavara, on whose head was set a big price, and for whose capture the military and police authorities of two countries were working night and day.

Great would have been the surprise of these officials had they ever met this notorious robber chief. Instead of the fierce eyed, grizzly bearded giant that was the popular conception of him, he was a small, sallow faced, smooth shaven youth of about three and twenty, with delicate hands and small, refined features. His attire was elegant to the verge of foppishness, with gold spurs at his heels and an exquisite sword of the finest workmanship dangling by his side.

He had the gloomy, morose expression of a fanatic, and his great black eyes were always a key to his emotions; you had but to watch them to read his thoughts.

If it seemed strange that such a gang of cutthroats should have flocked to the standard of this callow looking youth, one had not far to seek for an explanation. His square jaw and thin, firm lips told of a wonderful will, and as for courage and daring, there was no scoundrel in all his band to equal him.

His deeds of deviltry had earned their respect and allegiance; and strange as it may seem, the contempt and cruelty with which he treated his men did but serve to strengthen the bonds that bound them to him. There was a story current amongst his followers to the effect that he had come of a noble Spanish family, and that for some terrible deed he had fled to the mountains to become an outlaw.

Don Alonzo was riding slightly in advance of his men, who were on foot, and at his side rode a fellow on a wiry little pony with a shaggy mane. It was the lieutenant, René Rignault.

"Yes, it must be done tonight, Cavara," the lieutenant was saying; "otherwise there would be no excuse for my not joining my regiment tomorrow, as ordered."

The youthful captain fixed his gloomy eyes on the count.

"I understand," he said, gravely nodding his head.

"And now, one thing more before we part—until tonight—see to it that several of your men lay hands on me and carry me off, despite my apparently fierce resistance."

Don Alonzo smiled grimly.

"My men are not good actors, lieutenant," replied Cavara. "Their attack on you would likely be more realistic than you could wish. However, I will see that they do you no bodily harm, or their heads shall answer for it."

"Don Cavara, ever since I have had the pleasure of meeting you two days ago, I have been at a loss to account for the absolute power you seem to exert over your men," remarked Rignault, with a note of admiration in his voice.

Just then they were interrupted by noisy shouting close in the rear. With an angry scowl Cavara turned in his saddle to see whence came the uproar.

Two ruffians were amusing themselves by flinging rocks at each other, and the missiles were flying thick and fast through the air. Just as Cavara turned around, a stone, thrown with reckless aim, hit him on the forehead.

The fury of the man was something terrible to see. With eyes gleaming like those of a wild animal, with dilated nostrils and the blood trickling down his face, he looked scarcely human, and the count, who knew what passion was himself, could not repress a shudder at the sight.

"Come here!" said Cavara in an awful voice to the man who had hit him with the stone.

In the midst of absolute silence, and with a terror stricken face, the burly ruffian, who would have cut another man's throat, came up to his master like a whipped cur. As the fellow reached him, Don Alonzo whipped out a revolver, and with an oath, brought the weapon crashing down on his skull. Without a sound the man fell like a log.

Two or three comrades started forward to pick him up.

"Leave him, you dogs!" shouted their captain savagely, as he wiped the blood from his face. "The first man that touches him I will brain as I did him!"

Without a murmur the men obeyed, and the whole cavalcade was again in motion, leaving the poor wretch, dead or dying, where he had fallen.

"You have answered my question, captain," murmured the lieutenant with pale lips. "The members of your band are a lot of wild beasts, and you are the lion tamer."

A gleam of sardonic humor flashed over his companion's features.

"You are a man of discernment, Count Rignault," he said drily, "but here our ways part. *Adios* until tonight."

CHAPTER XIV.—A NOTE FROM THE COUNT.

THERE was much commotion at the chateau the next morning when the men servants were informed of their dismissal, and no doubt in some cases the complaints heard were sincere and just enough, for not all of them were guilty of treachery to their mistress. But that could not be helped; the only safe way was to ship them all.

This was not a very easy matter, for many were disposed to be ugly, but the presence of the faithful Peters and the two stewards (determined looking fellows both), precluded any attempt to raise a row.

The men, one and all, called loudly for Louis, whom they regarded as their chief, and whose absence they could not understand.

However, in the course of the forenoon the English servants were duly installed in the house, and what they lacked in numbers they made up in zeal.

The countess fully expected a call of protest from the marquis regarding the change in servants, but none came.

Marie hardly knew what to make of it, but Cottrell gave it as his opinion that the count, for his own good reasons, had prevailed upon his father to ignore the matter for the present at any rate. The American was right in his surmise, as was afterwards shown.

The day passed quietly enough; there was no sign of the count, and, stranger still, there was no sign of Jean Daron. Cottrell began to grow uneasy about his prolonged absence, but as the countess did not seem to notice it, he said nothing on the subject, not wishing to alarm her unnecessarily.

For all that, the man's disappearance weighed heavily on his mind, and when night fell and he went down to the beach to meet Struthers, as he landed, it was the first thing he spoke of.

"It would be a terrible blow to the countess if anything had happened to him," he said; "he is her one trusty adherent amongst her own people; and he certainly is a wonderfully valuable man."

Struthers, however, did not believe that aught had befallen him, but that in his pertinacious, dog-like way, he was investigating something where his instinct told him there was danger.

Owing to the isolated location of the chateau, it was deemed best by Struthers to keep all the windows and doors on the first floor carefully barred in the daytime as well as night.

It was strange that though they had not the slightest proof that they would be attacked by an armed force, there was a deep rooted conviction in the minds of all those in the chateau and aboard the Albatross that it was only a question of hours when the house would be stormed by a band of howling ruffians.

The second night passed peacefully and still no sign of danger; nor all that day did anything happen worth recording, with one little exception.

Towards sundown a horseman galloped up to the chateau. Cottrell sighted and went out to meet him, for the newcomer was in the livery of the count. Henry had never seen the man before, but that was nothing strange—inasmuch as he had seen very few of the servants from the Rignault establishment.

Cottrell could not help noticing the masterful face and haughty carriage of the man, which was strangely out of keeping in a servant, and instinctively the American mistrusted him.

"A message from the Count Rignault to Monsieur Cottrell, secretary to the countess, monsieur," said the horseman politely enough, but there was certainly nothing servile in his tone.

"I am Monsieur Cottrell," answered Cottrell.

"Ah! Is it so!" exclaimed the man, handing him a note, and the American fancied he looked keenly at him.

While Cottrell was reading the note, the messenger's eyes quickly scanned the house and grounds.

"You may tell Lieutenant Rignault I will meet him with my second at the hour named," said Cottrell, as he placed the note in his pocket.

"Very good, monsieur," replied the messenger, and then he added, with a slight smile, pointing to the barricaded windows, "You seem prepared to withstand a siege?"

"What's that to you?" said the other sharply.

"Oh, nothing," retorted the horseman over his shoulder as he galloped off, and then, as though his words had contained a huge joke, he broke out into a mocking laugh.

"Confound the fellow's impudence, any way!" cried Cottrell angrily, as he glared after him.

If he had known that the messenger was no servant at all but the bandit chief, Don Alonzo Cavara, how different would have been his emotions!

* * * * *

At precisely 10 P. M. Cottrell left the chateau, simply telling the countess he was going for a stroll on the beach with his friend.

As he stood ready to open the great front door Marie put a detaining hand on his arm.

"Monsieur," she said, "it may be only my nerves—I pray God it is, but I have a dreadful presentiment that all will not go well tonight." She paused and looked sadly up at him; something within her told her not to let him go from her.

"My dear countess," he replied, "what real harm can come to you? Already there is a guard of twelve stout hearted English sailors about the chateau, sufficient to repel a force of twice as many."

The countess looked hurt.

"I was not thinking of myself; they would not dare to do me any bodily harm," she said; "I was thinking of you."

"Have no fear; I will come back to you safe within the hour," he answered brightly, and so he went forth to meet his adversary.

And in his ears there still rang the last words of the Countess Marie, "I was thinking of you."

The time named for the meeting was eleven, and by twenty minutes of the hour, Cottrell and Struthers, who was to be his second, were at the appointed spot.

The place named in the count's note was at a considerable distance from the chateau, and quite near the beach. Taking advantage of this, Struthers had a boat's crew of ten armed men under Kent close at hand. They were to keep by the boat unless Struthers should blow on his boatswain's whistle, which would be equivalent to a call to quarters and a gentle scrimmage.

At exactly on the stroke of eleven the count appeared upon the scene, but quite alone.

"Gentlemen," he said, "having just returned from a little hunting trip, I was unable in time to procure a suitable second, but I am willing to dispense with that formality, trusting to your honor."

It seemed to take a long time to arrange all the preliminaries, the count raising point after point. He was in a strangely nervous mood; a creaking of the trees, a sudden moan of the wind, caused him to stop and listen like one who was in dread of something.

"Come, lieutenant, we have delayed matters long enough!" exclaimed Struthers.

To tell the truth, the count on one pretext or another, was putting off the actual struggle as long as he could, and now, being forced to it, he reluctantly picked up his foil and stood *en garde*.

Struthers dropped the handkerchief, and immediately the men were at it, thrusting and parrying with all the skill of two practiced swordsmen.

The Frenchman was the better fencer of the two, but his adversary had the cooler nerve, and the steadier hand, so that they were fairly matched.

For the space of a full minute there was nothing heard but the low murmuring of the surf on the beach, and the light sound of steel against steel, as one blade clashed against the other, or went sliding along upon it with a short squeak.

Suddenly, in the midst of the duel there was heard a dozen sharp reports,

followed by a confused hubbub from the direction of the chateau, and then there arose on the night air a woman's shrill, piercing cry.

CHAPTER XV.—THE NIGHT ATTACK.

THE sound would have been disconcerting enough at any time, but in Cottrell's case, it nearly paralyzed him with fear for the safety of the countess, and his sword arm dropped by his side. With a look of malignant triumph the count made a desperate lunge at his unguarded opponent, and there is no doubt the foul thrust would have then and there ended the career of Henry Cottrell but for the timely aid of Struthers, who like a flash leaped forward and with his own sword, which he held unsheathed in his hand, he struck up René's blade, disarming him with the same blow.

"You damnable scoundrel!" shouted the Englishman, beside himself with rage.

All this had taken but a moment. "To the chateau!" cried Struthers, and he blew a shrill blast on his whistle.

With an answering yell the tars came rushing up from the beach. At the same moment a score or more of desperate looking ruffians sprang up as if by magic, barring the way to the frantic Cottrell and the furious Struthers, who was raging like a wild bull.

In an instant the opposing forces met. Both sides fought like demons, but nothing could stand before the terrible onslaught of Struthers and Cottrell, who fought with the spirit of desperation, backed up by the bulldog tenacity of the British sailors, who simply would not give an inch.

Suddenly the bandits turned and fled across the lawn.

Two of them had been seen attempting to carry off the count. The sailors, thinking him one of their own party, went in hot pursuit, firing as they ran. At last, to save their own skins, the ruffians dropped the lieutenant, who lay where he fell, badly wounded by a chance shot.

The dueling party and the sailors then rushed pell mell for the chateau, only to find they were too late. All was deathly quiet about the place. There was no sound or sight of the men who had been placed on guard. There was no doubt that they had been overpowered by a larger force.

Cottrell dashed into the house, calling wildly for the countess, but there was no reply. Everything was in fearful disorder, showing that the chateau had been hastily ransacked.

At the door leading to the countess' private apartments lay the senseless form of Peters, with a great gash over his forehead.

Cottrell looked eagerly through all the rooms, but there was no sign of Marie de Villiers. Poor Mrs. Peters crouched in one corner of the boudoir, moaning feebly, her poor wits all muddled by the frightful scene through which she had passed.

As Cottrell looked about the room he suddenly espied his own photograph, the one he had mailed the countess when he answered her advertisement in the *Times*. It was prettily framed, and occupied the place of honor on her dressing table; and written across the front of it were the words, "*Henri mon brave.*"

A sudden gust of emotion seized him. As he stood there before this shrine of a girl's affections, revealing her love for him, his heart seemed swelled to breaking, and with a despairing cry he threw himself before the dainty little toilet table.

"Come, come!" said a sympathetic voice in his ear; "it's not so bad as that. Don't have a fear for the countess' safety; the bandits would not dare to offer her any harm. They are after a big ransom, depend upon it."

Henry uncovered his face and looked up at his friend.

"Struthers, old man," he said in a broken voice, "you are as good as gold. But I'm certain there's more at the bottom of this night's work than appears on the surface."

"You may be right, Henry, but we shall track those scoundrels to their lair, and if we don't have a good reckoning with them we'll know the reason why."

"Aye!" said Cottrell; "I'm with you to the end, but will that bring my love back to me?" Then he added wearily, "I suppose that is news to you."

"The fact that you're in love with the countess and she with you?" asked Struthers. "Not by a long shot. I guessed it long ago!"

Bit by bit Cottrell threw off the stupor that seemed to have paralyzed his brain and his actions, and presently he became desperately anxious to be off in pursuit of the brigands, but Struthers more wisely counseled that they should wait till daybreak and reconnoiter a bit.

Then, too, several of the sailors who had been but slightly wounded in the attack could join their party after a few hours for rest and the care of their wounds.

Struthers then went down stairs and by a blast of his whistle summoned his men. In the course of ten minutes about twenty of his force of twenty five (including Kent with one arm in a sling) straggled in.

Nearly every man of them had some sort of a wound to show as a result of the fierce fight, and as testimony to his gallant defense.

It was with a fierce desire for revenge that Struthers noted these casualties. As for Captain Kent, he could scarcely contain himself for rage.

It was hastily decided that at dawn the sailors should be divided into two bands, one under the direction of Struthers, and the other under Cottrell, to scour the mountain passes in search of the brigands and their leader.

For a body of foreigners (and sailors at that) to penetrate strange forests in search of an enemy of unknown strength was certainly a hazardous, not to say hopeless, undertaking, and it showed clearly the desperate spirit of the men who were determined to undertake it.

Possibly two hours had elapsed since the attack, and they were all eagerly watching for the first streak of dawn, when there suddenly appeared in the open doorway of the house a short, stout man in the rough dress of a mountain outlaw.

The sailors and their leader who were grouped together in the vast entrance hall instinctively reached for their guns.

The stranger advanced a step or two towards them and pulled off the slouch hat that shaded his face.

"Jean Daron!" cried Cottrell and Struthers in a breath, as they rushed forward to greet him.

"Yes, monsieur," said that calm little fellow, with something approaching a grin on his features, "it is I, Jean Daron, late gardener, and now a member of Don Alonzo Cavara's famous band of brigands!"

There was something so infectious about Daron's placid and almost cheerful demeanor that the others gathered about him with eager faces and brighter eyes, feeling confident, somehow, that the newcomer brought them good news.

In a few words Jean explained his present position and why he had left so mysteriously.

"After I left you, gentlemen, on the beach the other night," he said, "I went to keep an eye on the count, but I could find no trace of him. A few hours ago I came in collision with a band of brigands hovering about the chateau. It was too late to warn you, for they had sentinels posted about; besides, they had caught sight of me. So, putting on a bold front, I walked right up to some of the fellows and asked to be taken to their chief at once, as I had important information to convey to him.

"Immediately they conducted me to the presence of Don Cavara. I told him I was a discharged servant of the countess, and that I could show his men where the plate was kept. I pretended, of course, that I wanted a share of the booty, and further asked him to let me join his band, as I could never show my face about here again without being arrested. To this he readily agreed.

"I foresaw that they would capture the countess, and I knew that if I could be near her, it would keep up her courage."

Struthers and Cottrell fairly embraced the little Frenchman in their joy, for his ready wit and loyal devotion had relieved them of one of their worst fears.

"But how came you here?" asked Struthers. "Will not the bandits suspect the cause of your absence?"

"No," was the reply. "Not yet. I was chosen as one of several to forage about, owing to my familiarity with the country. But I must now return without delay. You will be glad to know that the countess is not unattended. Anne Trevoir is with her, and Don Alonzo, who seems to have taken a fancy to my mistress, has ordered that she be treated with every respect."

"Have you any idea of your probable destination?" inquired Struthers.

"Yes, monsieur; we shall travel direct by the mountain pass nearest the sea until we shall have arrived at the brigands' stronghold, which lies just across the Spanish border. It is an old castle, and very well defended. My advice to you is not to attack the band *en route*; they are too powerful and numerous for that, but to follow their fresh trail (I shall do everything I can to make it plain) until you have tracked them to their lair.

"Then watch and wait. It will be only a question of a few days before the band will sally forth again in quest of more booty, leaving a small garrison to guard the prisoners."

The two friends readily agreed with Daron that this was the best plan to follow, and then, laden with many messages to the countess telling her to keep

up a stout heart, and that her release would soon be effected, the little Frenchman took his departure.

CHAPTER XVI.—THE PURSUIT.

WHILE Struthers, Cottrell and Captain Kent were quietly discussing certain details of their future plans, the sailors had grouped themselves at some little distance, and were holding a very animated conversation in low tones. And presently, just as the trio were about to give the order to start on the expedition, a sailor, acting as spokesman, approached Struthers and touched his cap respectfully.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," he said politely enough, but in decided terms, "we boys has decided we aren't goin' on no chase through them mountains. We've 'ad enough fightin' already, an' yer can't say we didn't do our damndest! But we didn't ship for no brigand chasing. We be sailors an' not deputy police. Without wishin' to be disrespectful, sir, the boys as asked me to inform you that they won't go another step further in this 'ere adventure!"

Kent sprang to his feet and glared at his men like an enraged bull.

"What in 'ell does this mean?" he roared. "I'll have every one of you blasted mutinous seadogs put in irons for this!"

"Shut up, Kent," said Struthers. Then turning to the group of tars, who shifted and stirred uneasily under his stern eyes, he addressed them as follows:

"Boys, you have shown the stuff you are made of this night, and I thank you for what you did. Now, I can't compel you to go after those outlaws, but if you have any heart you'll not hesitate to follow me and rescue that unfortunate girl, who is in the clutches of Don Cavara. It is true I never bargained for such work as we have had this night. The worst I expected was a tussle with ten or a dozen cutthroats—certainly not a company of brigands—and you must not imagine for a moment that if I had dreamed of such a thing, I wouldn't have prepared you for what was to come.

"I strongly suspect that the countess has been betrayed into captivity by a certain relative of hers, but, however that may be, she is a captive, and we would not be men if we did not attempt her rescue. Now, what have you all to say?"

A great big burly fellow spoke up: "Why don't you put the matter in the hands of the police, then, as is their business to look out fer sech affairs?"

"Because we don't want the knowledge of our connection with this affair to come to the authorities, if we can help it, for very good reasons, and let that be enough for you, Jack Bender!" said Struthers shortly.

The sailors held another brief consultation, and then their spokesman again addressed Struthers.

"Sir, if this was any 'ornary adventure, with the chances of a broken 'ead hand nothing more, we'd be with you, every one on us, and you know, sir, on shipboard we'd fight while there was a plank hunder our feet. But yer see, sir, we be mostly married men wi' families to look arter, and to run our noses into that brigand lair to be hung up like a side o' beef is more than we feel called

on to do. Like enough full one 'arf of us would never see the shores of hold Hengland agin!"

Such was their ultimatum, and even Kent knew there was no appealing from it; and when the trio came to look at the matter from the tars' standpoint, they could scarcely blame them. They had their own wives and children to look out for, as they had said, and it was very hard for them to get up much sentiment for a French countess, whom they had scarcely seen.

Cottrell and Struthers, of course, strongly suspected the count of being the instigator of the brigand attack, but it would be hard to prove it. For the time being, they gave very little thought to the lieutenant. The rescue of the countess was the question of moment, and it now seemed to be a more desperate enterprise than ever.

And it was Cottrell this time and not Struthers who decided on what should be their next move.

The refusal of the sailors to go farther in the affair made it plain that the rescue would have to be accomplished by stratagem, rather than by force, and arguing that one man would stand less chance of being discovered than two, Cottrell prevailed upon Struthers, much against his inclination, to remain with the Albatross, and watch the count, and if possible trace out his connection with Cavara's seizure of the countess.

It was then suggested that Cottrell take Kent with him, but on second thought it was deemed best not to do so, for his fiery temper and rough and ready manner would be sure to precipitate trouble before they were ready for it.

"There is only one thing that reconciles me to remaining behind," remarked Struthers, as he was wishing his friend godspeed on his dangerous mission, "and that is the opportunity I shall have to continue that little affair which you and the count were engaged in when the chateau was attacked."

"Poor Rignault," said Henry; "I can see *his* finish."

"It will be either his finish or mine!" was the grim answer.

When Cottrell set out for the mountains he had taken the precaution to change his appearance as much as possible. He shaved off his beard and waxed his mustache after the continental style, and dressed himself in the rough, coarse blouse of a peasant. To complete his disguise he stained his face a tawny brown, giving him the appearance of a man constantly exposed to the elements.

He had a good three days' tramp before him over the steep and arduous pass he must traverse. At one point this pass rises to a height of over seven thousand feet above the level of the sea, and at places the path is almost vertical, with great chasms yawning on one side and forming the bed of a mountain river, while snow capped peaks tower on the other.

During the first day's journey Cottrell covered a considerable distance, for the ascent was quite gradual at the start. He passed two or three little farms on a high plateau, the ground being furrowed all ready for planting the maize that grows at a great altitude.

When night came he sought the shelter of one of these little farm houses that was nothing more than a mere hut. Early the next morning he was off again, and by night of the second day all signs of civilization had vanished.

The pass became steeper and stonier. By degrees the vegetation grew scantier until nothing but some of the hardier plants were to be seen, and only great pine trees reared their lofty heads on all sides.

In the primeval stillness of these majestic mountains nothing was to be heard but the low sighing of the wind in the pines and the faint murmur of a turbulent stream, frothing and foaming along its rocky bed far below. There was something grand and awe inspiring in Cottrell's surroundings, but he had no eye for the beauties of nature; all his faculties were centered on one point—how to rescue Marie de Villiers, the girl he loved.

It was early morning of the third day, and according to all his calculations he should be somewhere near the bandits' stronghold by nightfall.

So anxious was he to reach his destination that he never glanced back. If he had done so now he would have seen a familiar figure ambling along after him as fast as the roughness and steepness of the path would permit.

Presently Cottrell's eye was caught by a patch of white upon a tree trunk some fifty yards ahead of him. As he drew nearer, he saw that it was a bit of paper. His heart beat fast; what if this were some message left behind by the faithful Jean?

And this it proved to be. In a clumsy but legible hand were written the following words:

Just ahead of you is the naked trunk of a dead pine. When you reach it, turn to the right and you are on the trail that leads to Cavara's mountain home. Look for lopped branches of fir trees lying on the ground, they will keep you on the trail. It will take you another day and a half to reach us.

Cottrell's delight knew no bounds. The date on the note told him that Cavara was only one day in advance of him.

"Dear old Jean," he thought; "he must have dropped behind the cavalcade and stuck this note on the tree. What a clever little fellow he is!"

He was to have another surprise much more startling, if not so pleasant.

Cottrell had just pulled down the missive and put it in his pocket, when a voice that made him start called out from behind: "Well, I'm glad to find a traveling companion in this lonely region."

Turning quickly he saw approaching him the familiar figure of Louis, the butler, his face red with exertion, and with that same cunning look in his eyes that Cottrell knew so well.

CHAPTER XVII.—HOW COTTRELL GAINS ACCESS TO THE CASTLE.

LOUIS was about the last person that Cottrell expected or hoped to see, and forgetting that he was disguised beyond recognition, he hauled out his revolver and aimed it at the newcomer.

"Now then, Master Louis, what are you following me for?" he demanded sternly.

Louis stopped short, a perplexed look creeping over his face. Cottrell's voice was strangely familiar, though he had not penetrated the disguise.

"How do you know my name?" asked the ex butler, vainly striving to place the man before him.

"I ought to know it well enough," began Cottrell ironically; then in a flash it came over him that because of his disguise, Louis had not recognized him, and he added, with an inspiration: "Because I am one of Cavara's band!"

"Ah," cried Louis, as though relieved, "that accounts for it, and also that you speak French with a slight accent. I might have known you were a Spaniard from your complexion. Well now, my friend, no more need of a hostile demonstration; please put that revolver up; I am myself bound for Cavara's castle, and I shall be greatly obliged to you for showing me the way. I had some directions about turning to the right by a dead tree, but I'm a little in doubt as to keeping on the trail."

"What business have you with my chief?" inquired Cottrell, as though suspicious, but really for information.

"Oh, that's all right, my friend," replied Louis, tapping his breast; "I have here a sealed packet from Count Rignault to be delivered by these hands to Don Cavara."

"Show it to me."

The man did as he was bid, but held it tightly in his hands all the time.

"Very good. Come along," said Cottrell, and on they went till the dead tree was reached.

"This must be the place to turn off, isn't it?" inquired Louis.

"Yes," said the other, and they toiled on for some time in silence.

The path was narrow, hedged in by a tangled undergrowth, and underfoot it was very rough, with bared roots constantly threatening to trip one up. They had traveled about a mile, Cottrell leading, when the fat Louis caught his foot in a treacherous root that was extending out into the path and falling headlong, knocked his head against the sharp edge of a huge boulder that jutted out on the trail.

Cottrell, turning back quickly, found that he was insensible—stunned by the fall. He knelt over him and felt of his pulse. Evidently he was not seriously hurt.

It did not take the American long to make up his mind what to do. Quickly and deftly he extracted the letter addressed to Cavara from the other's pocket. Then hastily he bandaged up the great wound on Louis' forehead, to prevent him from bleeding to death, left him where he was, and went rapidly on his way.

Soon the path became so faint that Cottrell would surely have lost it but for the occasional withered branch of a fir tree that he found lying on the ground, and which the faithful Daron had evidently hacked off as he went along.

"I suppose I should have been justified in killing Louis," thought Cottrell, half in doubt as to whether he had done wisely. "But somehow I couldn't put an end to the fellow in cold blood, much as he deserves it. I don't think he will be able to follow me, for the trail is so faint he will be sure to lose his way."

After he had put several miles between him and his late companion, he halted beneath the shadow of a great tree, and seating himself on a fallen

trunk, proceeded to examine the contents of the envelope he had taken from Louis. It contained two papers; one of them was inscribed as follows:

I, René Rignault, agree to pay to Don Alonzo Cavara one hundred thousand francs on the day that I shall take legal possession of the estate of Marie, Countess de Villiers.

The other paper read:

MON CHERE CAVARA:

THE devil's luck is mine. I was badly wounded in that scrimmage the other night and your cowardly rascals left me behind; so I cannot pose as my cousin's rescuer, as I had intended. My plan was to have offered to save her life and honor if she would at last accept my hand in marriage; if not, I had decided to leave her to your tender mercies.

Perhaps after all it is best as it is, for I really believe I hate my haughty cousin more than I love her. As for you, I should rather imagine her high and mighty bearing would appeal to your taste; but beware of the soft little thing—she has claws and knows how to use them! When she is aroused not even the iron will of a Don Cavara could tame her.

However, that's your affair—not mine. Do with her as you will. *Only see that she never returns to France and the Chateau de Frenoir!* Please destroy this note as soon as read.

R. R.

This brutal letter had a strange effect on Cottrell. He did not rave or stamp about in impotent rage, but he turned pale under the brown stain, and a look appeared in his eyes that had never been seen there before.

It meant that the gentle, chivalrous man had been aroused to a point where all mercy was banished from his heart. He was now the unrelenting bloodhound, and if Louis had been with him then, nothing could have saved him from the vengeance of this monomaniac, for such he had become.

Passively and collectedly he set his brains to work on the best means of taking advantage of the capture of the document that was to sell Marie into slavery, and worse than slavery.

There was something awful in the calm fury of this man which spoke only through his eyes and his set lips as he strode along the trail which grew more rough with every step. Unconsciously he increased his pace, disregarding the scratches and bruises his headlong gait caused him.

Cottrell was enough of a woodsman to note the signs about him telling of the recent passing of Cavara's band. Only when night fell did he stop, and then from sheer exhaustion. It was about three o'clock of the next afternoon that he came in sight of his destination. The trail suddenly opened upon a great clearing of several acres extent, and at the farther end of it, perched half way up the side of a rocky peak, was the old castle, once the stronghold of a Spanish noble, and now the lair of the brigand chief Don Cavara.

At first Cottrell could see no way of gaining access to it, for the rock was almost sheer, but as he drew nearer, he perceived steps cut in the solid stone. Half way up this flight was a chasm, spanned by an imposing drawbridge, flanked by two turrets, where lookouts could be posted in time of danger.

As Cottrell boldly made his way up the steps toward the drawbridge, he found it drawn up against the archway.

Not a sound was heard, and not a moving thing was to be seen as Cottrell toiled up the primitive steps. Just as he reached the chasm a voice suddenly hailed him in Spanish from one of the turrets.

"Who goes?"

The American put his hands to his mouth and shouted back, in the same tongue.

"A messenger from Count Rignault to Don Cavara."

There was silence again for several minutes, and then was heard the rattling of chains and slowly the ponderous drawbridge descended to a horizontal position. At the same moment half a dozen evil looking ruffians came straggling down the stone steps from the castle and drew up in a line as Cottrell crossed the bridge. In silence they closed in around him as he continued on his way towards the castle. Half way up he heard the noise of the drawbridge being hauled up again, and he felt as does a prisoner when the iron door of his cell swings to with a clank, and he knows that all retreat is cut off.

There was one contingency that Cottrell had not counted on in leaving Louis behind him alive and at liberty, and that was that a straggling member of the brigand band might happen along in time to act as guide to the ex butler. Certainly his presence at the castle would be decidedly awkward for the American, now posing as the count's messenger, and who had already formulated a message of his own to take the place of the written one.

His play of action was audacious enough, but he trusted to its very boldness to carry it through to a successful finish.

CHAPTER XVIII.—IN THE LION'S DEN.

THE leader of the guard that had escorted Cottrell into the entrance of the castle motioned him to halt, and then he leisurely made his way along the vast hall and disappeared through a great doorway.

Everything about the place was of vast proportions.

Though from the outside the American had discerned no signs of life, he now saw that the castle fairly swarmed with men. They lounged about in picturesque groups talking and laughing in their rough way, but for all that there was a semblance of restraint in their movements that had not been apparent when on the march. Whatever license their despotic chief allowed them while out for booty, rioting and debauchery were not permitted within those walls.

Some of the fellows were engaged in card playing, and the stakes were various odd trinkets and bits of plate that Cottrell recognized as having been stolen from the Chateau de Frenoir. Others were busy polishing and cleaning their weapons, and the young American thought with a half desire to laugh that if they had expended a little of the energy which they put into the furnishing up of their firearms, into the proper attention to their own persons, the results would be worth attaining.

Not all of the company were busy. A full score of bandaged ruffians lay about in various attitudes of ease, according to the nature of their wounds. These, thought Cottrell, with a thrill of grim satisfaction, were received during their descent on the chateau; and every time one of them shifted his position with a heavy groan, the American felt a kind of wild pleasure at the sound.

For the time being all his finer instincts were smothered and not one of this reckless crew of daredevils had less of pity in his soul.

The men about him glanced occasionally at Cottrell with idle curiosity, but apparently they took no special interest in his sudden appearance.

Presently the guard returned, and dismissing the others, told Cottrell to follow him. He stopped before a large doorway, and pulling to one side the curtain that obstructed it, bade him enter, dropping the curtain behind him.

In striking contrast to all the other barren apartments by which Cottrell had come, the one in which he now found himself was garnished with all the luxuriousness of a modern Spanish palace, whence its furnishings had most likely been taken by force during one of Cavara's raids.

The stone walls were hung with great tapestries and further adorned with spears and ancient coats of mail and innumerable trophies, including some fine paintings. Even the altars and shrines of the churches had felt the desecrating hand of these redoubtable brigands, and been made to furnish their quota of rich treasure, to swell the coffers and adorn the castle of Don Cavara.

In a massive armchair before the huge fireplace sat a man so engrossed in his own thoughts that he evidently had not marked the entrance of the newcomer.

Cottrell knew that this must be the chief himself, the comparative splendor of the vast room, the exquisite appearance and dress of the man, all pointed to this conclusion.

Presently he leaned forward, as though come to some sudden resolution, and striking both arms of the chair with his clenched fists, he cried aloud: "I will, I will!" and with that he sprang up and faced about.

He stopped short as he perceived his visitor, and immediately all signs of emotion vanished from his face, leaving it as impenetrable as a mask. Only the cruel set of his thin lips and a disagreeable squint of his restless black eyes betrayed the nature of the man.

Cottrell gave a slight start, as he recognized in his *vis à vis* the impudent messenger who had delivered to him Lieutenant Rignault's challenge.

"You come from Count Rignault," said Cavara, in his overbearing way. "Give me his message!" and he held out an impatient hand.

"The message is verbal," replied Cottrell, trying to speak in a servile tone.

The Spaniard's black eyebrows came down.

"There was to have been a signed document—the fulfilment of a promise," he said harshly.

"Just so," replied Cottrell quickly; "you mean the matter of the hundred thousand francs?"

The brigand chief looked sharply at his companion.

"The count evidently makes a confidant of his servants! Yes, you are right. It is the matter of the hundred thousand francs I allude to. What do you know about it?"

"The count made me to say to you, señor," replied Cottrell, in a measured voice, "that he did not dare trust to any written message, for fear of it falling into wrong hands, for the compromising nature of the communication would surely bring ruin upon him. He therefore begs of you that you will meet him

on the fourth day at sundown, just over the border of Bayonne, when all negotiations may be consummated."

"How do I know but that this is a trap?" demanded Cavara, fastening his suspicious eyes on Cottrell.

The American smiled deprecatingly. "With your band of men at your back, prepared for any emergency, surely you would be exposed to no danger, señor."

"What proof have I that you are Count Rignault's messenger? How do I know that you are not a police or military spy?" snapped out the Spaniard savagely. This change of the count's plans had not pleased him.

"You can keep me here as hostage till you return from your interview with Lieutenant Rignault," answered Cottrell quietly enough, but his heart was beating like a triphammer, for on the brigand's decision hung the success or failure of his daring plan of rescue.

Cavara paced thoughtfully up and down the long apartment, viciously gnawing his nails and bearing himself after the manner of one who is at war within himself.

Presently, as the Spaniard in his paces approached a window that overlooked a sort of inner court, he paused abruptly and gazed out with an intentness that attracted Cottrell's notice.

The American was just behind the other, and looking out over his shoulder, he started with a smothered exclamation, for below him was the countess with the girl Anne.

They were walking slowly up and down, evidently for the sake of the fresh air and exercise.

Cottrell felt his heart thrill with love and admiration at the sight of the beautiful Marie, bearing herself with the same stately grace, the same easy poise of the head, those outward signs of her inherent nobleness of character.

As Cottrell looked he saw Marie shiver slightly and draw more closely about her her light wrap, for the mountain air was chilling, and circumstances had prevented her from preparing for her new surroundings.

"A pretty picture," said Cavara, turning suddenly around on his companion. The Spaniard's face had flushed deeply, and there was a new light in his eyes that gave Cottrell a thrill of vague alarm.

"That charming picture," continued Cavara, in his ringing, masterful tone, "has brought me to a decision. Tell your master that I shall not stir one step from here except on my own pleasure, and that it does not suit my pleasure to do his bidding now. Tell him he need not keep his promise of the hundred thousand francs' payment. *For I intend to make the countess my wife*, and then anything he does to interfere with her rights, he shall have to answer to me for. For then her rights shall be mine!"

If the brigand chief had not been so engrossed with his own thoughts and passions, Cottrell's horror stricken face would have betrayed something of the truth to the Spaniard.

The poor countess' plight was indeed a desperate one; worse—far worse—than had been her unhappy lot at home.

So long as Cottrell believed that Cavara was merely actuated by merce-

nary motives in seizing and carrying off Marie de Villiers, hope had not left him of her ultimate escape; but now that he realized the appalling situation, all hope died, and in its place crept despair.

CHAPTER XIX.—COTTRELL BECOMES A FULL FLEDGED BRIGAND.

THE most demoralizing thing that can happen to a strong nature is to lose hope. Cottrell, with the instinct of an animal at bay, resolved on one last throw that would mean life or death to him, and freedom or slavery to the girl he loved.

While Cavara had been dictating to him the insolent message he was to carry to his supposed master, Cottrell listened as though in a dream, the words sounding in his ears like the distant murmur of a brook, the one phrase only stamped on his brain—“*I intend to marry the countess!*”

His Yankee ingenuity was hard at work planning the details of a new scheme, that must either succeed or be his last.

Cavara, who in his own mind had made an end of the business as far as Cottrell was concerned, began once more his moody pacing to and fro, while the American stood with bent head, staring at a spot on the stone floor, his throbbing brain searching out from the wild chaos of ideas and contending emotions a coherent plan of action that was to be his final coup.

Suddenly the Spaniard's harsh voice broke in upon his thoughts.

“What! Not gone yet, Master Messenger? Now make haste and deliver my answer to Lieutenant Rignault, or I shall have to get a couple of my men to teach you speed with a few lashes!”

Not only were the words brutal, but the tone was more than self respect could stand. No wonder that the American drew himself up, his fists clenched, his eyes flashing defiance; and thus for a full minute these two fearless men stood facing each other, the one trying to choke down the outburst of passion that must ruin his plans, the other watching narrowly his adversary with a thrill of conscious domination, though he knew not at what moment he might be grappling with a powerful antagonist.

The battle was ended. Cottrell had won a victory over himself. Slowly the color died out of his face; his hands dropped nervelessly by his side.

But all this not before Cavara had learned the true character of the man before him.

“So!” he said with a dry smile, “you have a spirit of your own!”

“I am not accustomed to being talked to in that way,” replied Cottrell in a low voice.

“Then Count Rignault must be more considerate of his servants than I should have believed,” was the tart rejoinder.

“I think, señor, that he rather respects my temper!” said Cottrell with a grim smile. This statement was at least true.

“Come, I'll propose a bargain. I'll send one of my men as messenger, while you shall remain to enter my service. You please me. You are a man of spirit, and that is the sort of man I want about me. The more temper there is in a fellow, the more pleasure in er——”

"Taming him," suggested Henry drily.

Cavara stared hard at him for a few seconds.

"The more I see of you the more I respect you," he said shortly. "Now send one of my men to me, and from now on you shall be a member of Don Cavara's band!" and the chief dismissed him with a curt nod.

Cottrell was glad the Spaniard had taken it for granted that he would willingly join his forces. It saved him considerable lying, and the American, no matter how excusable the circumstances, had a natural distaste for anything underhand.

Fifteen minutes later a fleet footed messenger was on his way to the imaginary rendezvous Cottrell had named, and the American breathed a sigh of relief as he saw him depart. It would be at least a week before he could return with the news of the fraud, and that was as good as a lifetime to Cottrell in effecting the escape of his sweetheart.

No one took any particular notice of him as he wandered around the exterior of the castle. The position of the stronghold was impregnable. No body of foot soldiers could ever storm it, and as for artillery, it would have been the work of months to have cleared the way and build a road for the transportation of heavy guns.

"No wonder Don Cavara feels a veritable monarch of all he surveys!" thought the Yankee gloomily.

His one hope now was that something would occur to require the absence of Cavara and most of his band; that, and that alone, would give him the shadow of a chance to accomplish what he had come so far to bring about.

If he had not had so much to engross his thoughts, it might have struck him as decidedly strange that Cavara should have sought his services, and that, too, without knowing what manner of man he was.

Cottrell did indeed give the matter a passing thought, but put it out of his mind with the reflection that it was simply a whim of a very eccentric character. Little did he dream what a deep and diabolical design was behind it all!

"Making a survey?" inquired a voice in his ear, and there was Cavara himself gazing intently at him with his great gloomy eyes, though he smiled with his lips.

Cottrell did not like the effect, for there was certainly nothing of mirth in his expression.

"Yes," replied Cottrell quietly, "I was interested in tracing the source of your water supply."

"Indeed?" returned the other smoothly; "sometimes there is a drought, but at present, I am glad to say, the supply is most abundant. By the way, what is your name?"

"Call me Juan, señor."

"Ah! Well, Juan, as you are now one of us, it may interest you to see something of the castle. The original occupant of this place had a strange use for that mountain brook you note yonder. How bright and fresh and harmless it looks, does it not, Juan, as it comes tumbling down over those rocks above us? If I may use a simile, it is like a merry dancing maiden on a May morning!" and Cavara, who had spoken in a dry, bantering tone, looked at his

companion with a sudden gleam in his eyes that, if it was to be taken as expressive of fun, was certainly of a very grim sort.

"Follow me, and you shall see how a religious fanatic of the olden days treated those who differed with him in creed." And so saying Cavara led the way around the corner of the huge ramparts to a square, low, gloomy looking pile of masonry that stood by the side of the moat.

The entrance was a narrow portal, which opened into a dark, clammy passage, the sides covered with a green, moss-like growth that told of dampness.

At the end of it came a few steps trending downward, and then before them Cottrell perceived a cavernous dungeon, its sides reeking with moisture, the stone flooring a mass of greenish slime. The only light came from a couple of narrow slits in the wall, just by the roof.

As soon as Cottrell's eyes had become accustomed to the semi darkness, he perceived a queer object at one corner.

"What is that, señor?" he asked curiously.

The brigand chief laughed grimly.

"That, Juan, is a pump, and over against the wall just behind it, you will see some chains dangling from a ring imbedded in the masonry."

"And what was it all for, señor?" asked Cottrell, shivering slightly, for the air was frightfully damp and the whole place inexpressibly gruesome.

"By pulling up a small trap in the wall, this place (which is level with the moat) is quickly filled with water. When our old friend, the fanatical lord of this castle, chanced to get his claws upon a heretic, it was his chief delight to fasten the wretch to those chains to prevent his escape, pull up the trap, and then leave him to pump for his life. If he was a strong man and had not been broken on the rack, he might keep the water at bay for a few hours, but sooner or later, the inexorable inflow began to gain on him, inch by inch, until, with a last despairing cry, that ends in a gurgle, the waters close over him, and the end has come."

"How horrible!" muttered Cottrell, feeling his nerves tingle at the mere thought of the dreadful scenes that had been enacted here, though so long ago.

He stepped carefully over the uneven, slimy floor and looked curiously at the pump; it was very primitive and old fashioned. He tried it. To his surprise, the handle moved noiselessly on its pivot, as though well oiled.

"It seems in excellent repair!" he commented in considerable astonishment.

"Yes," replied Cavara, "it is. I have just had it put in order. A mere whim of mine," he added smoothly.

"And look," went on Cottrell, "the chain is strong, and two of the links are newly forged!"

"Yes," said Cavara, pleasantly; "looks as though it would stand a good deal of tugging and hauling, doesn't it?"

Cottrell gave an uneasy laugh.

"It is the most diabolical piece of ingenuity I have ever heard of! But surely you would not have to resort to such extreme and cruel measures to make even the most miserly of men part with his money!"

The Spaniard gave him one venomous look, his face flushing darkly.

"There are other things that are more difficult to make a man part with, Juan; his sweetheart, for instance."

What was it that gave Cottrell a vague feeling of alarm—that bade him be on his guard against some new danger? Had this reference to sweethearts anything to do with him?

It was a relief to the American when they reached the open air, where the sun was shining, and all nature seemed aglow with life and vitality.

CHAPTER XX.—COTTRELL FINDS HOPE AND LOSES IT.

COTTRELL had caught no sight of little Daron, nor had he seen anything of Marie except for that one glimpse of her in the court.

He had been at the castle two days, but so far, fortune had not favored him. He dared not exhibit any desire to meet the countess, nor did he risk questioning any of the men who spent the time in idleness, lolling about and smoking to their hearts' content.

But on the morning of the third day there were signs of bustle and preparation, and he gathered from the men that night would find them on the march again. Whither or for what purpose he could not ascertain.

Then Cavara sent for him, and told him that as "business" called him away for a short time, he had determined to place him—Cottrell—in charge of the countess with ten of his trusty fellows as a body guard, "to see that no one forces an entrance while I am gone," he explained; "and," he added grimly, "that no one leaves!"

It was all that Cottrell could do to conceal his great joy at the turn affairs had taken, and it was with a light heart that he watched the cavalcade file out of the castle and over the massive drawbridge to disappear in the woods.

"The time for action has come," he said to himself.

But for some minutes he did not move, but stood motionless, leaning against a huge buttress, his thoughts busy with the past, the present and the future.

"Just one year ago, Henry Cottrell," he reflected, apostrophizing himself, "you left New York on a cattle steamer, bound for London, with the expectation that you would settle down when you reached your journey's end as a clerk on a small pay, with an occasional half holiday, and a very occasional orchestra stall at the Alhambra, as the spice of life. So had hardships blunted your ambition.

"But fate, Henry Cottrell, had ordained it that no such quiet, prosaic existence should be yours. And now, after going through enough adventures to turn your hair gray, you find yourself a full fledged brigand, with the certainty of being garrotted if caught by the authorities; a jailer in charge of a kidnapped countess, who is also the girl you love; and lastly, a sort of amateur detective, striving to rescue this girl, whom you have the honor to serve as jailer. A most ambiguous position certainly."

It puzzled Cottrell sorely that Cavara should have placed him in such a responsible position; but as long as chance had favored him, he made up his mind to take advantage of the circumstance, and without delay. He thought

it strange that he had seen nothing of Daron, especially as he knew the little fellow must be on the lookout for him, and would naturally seek the first opportunity to communicate with him.

Cottrell had made up his mind that, once free of the castle, safety lay in the direction of a Spanish coast town rather than towards France, where Cavara would most likely go in pursuit.

"Captain, what are your orders?" said a voice in his ear, and there stood a great hulk of a fellow with a grin on his face and a sly twinkle in his eye.

For a moment Cottrell did not realize what the villain meant; then it dawned on him that it was the commandant of the post, so to speak.

He did not like the man's manner, but it was not good policy to resent it, so he replied good naturedly: "No orders, but to enjoy life till your master's return, only arranging to be ready for a sudden summons."

The fellow at this gave a grunt in token of having understood, and betook himself off in a leisurely fashion.

Suddenly Cottrell hailed him. "Manuel!"—he had heard the other men so style him—"send word to the countess that I will wait upon her at her earliest convenience, to see if there is anything she may wish."

Manuel nodded and disappeared. Hardly had he done so, when a familiar figure cautiously turned the corner of the wing of the castle where Cottrell was standing, and walking quickly up to the American, remarked quietly: "So, monsieur, you have come at last."

An almost imperceptible start was all the recognition Cottrell gave Jean Daron. The last few days had made a stoic of him, and he knew that he must not show surprise at meeting the Frenchman lest some one see and suspect.

He now turned slowly around and replied in a low voice: "Yes, Jean; does the countess know?"

"She does, monsieur."

"Ah! I am glad. What a rare piece of luck, Jean, that Cavara should have taken a fancy to me and made me his lieutenant!"

Daron's reply came like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky.

"I pray you, monsieur, brace yourself for what I must tell you. Cavara has guessed your identity. His putting you in charge here is only a part of some devilish scheme!"

The American felt a sudden weakness come over him; he grasped at a stone pillar for support. Great drops of cold sweat stood out on his forehead in shining beads. "Oh, God!" he groaned between his set teeth. "The countess! Fool, that I've been!"

"I tell you, monsieur," broke in Jean's voice, "the countess will starve if better food is not provided for her. Her delicate palate will not stand the coarse fare!" In a low tone he added: "Make some reply, monsieur; we are watched!"

With a mighty effort Cottrell forced his demoralized wits to act.

"I will hear what the countess has to say in person," he answered roughly, his voice sounding harsh and strange to his own ears. "And now have done with your complainings!"

Then Manuel, who had crept up softly, evidently intending to play the spy, announced that the countess would receive her jailer.

CHAPTER XXI.—AN INTERVIEW WITH THE COUNTESS.

MANUEL started to lead the way, but Daron interposed.

"I am in attendance on her ladyship," he said. "I will guide monsieur."

Manuel hesitated and turned his shifty eyes from one to the other. He evidently had had his instructions, and was now in something of a quandary.

"All right!" he said presently. "It's all the same to me," and he turned his back on the two.

"Every man in this den of thieves is a spy!" muttered the Frenchman as he and Cottrell strode along the wing containing the countess' apartments. They proved to be spacious enough, but gloomy and barren to a degree.

Cottrell felt his heart swell with pity as he thought of the dreary life of the well bred young girl awaiting she knew not what fate. But there was one thing that in his modesty he had not realized, and that was Marie's complete confidence in him and his power to rescue her; for her faith in him was built on her love for him—a love that she did not understand, but which was such a sweet and beautiful thing that it filled her whole life, coloring the dreary hours of her existence with rainbow hues—an antidote for all hardships.

And while the girl Anne sat moaning in a corner, the young countess, with a smile on her lips, would tell her to be of good cheer, for "*Monsieur Henri* will come, and he will take us far, far away from this awful place and these brutal men."

How Cottrell could accomplish this; whither he would take them, she did not know; she only knew that he would come, and then all would be well.

Fortunately, no indignity had been offered her. Cavara was cruel, merciless; but a certain chivalry, the heritage of a noble name, still clung to him. He was a curious anomaly; a courtier by birth; an outlaw by force of circumstances, the great dominating passion of his life was a continuous revolt against civilization. He felt that God and man had cheated him of a great career.

Brooding over his fate had made him morose and bitter; a man of flint, from whom the only sparks struck were those of anger or hate—never of pity.

The countess was sitting by a huge window looking out over the landscape, when there came a knock at the door. Anne cautiously opened it, to admit Jean and Cottrell, who closed the door behind them.

Marie had been told of his disguise, so she knew the American at once, and the color crept up in her wan cheeks as she held out her hand.

"I knew you would come," she said, and there was no mistaking the expression in those eloquent eyes.

Cottrell forgot for the moment the net in whose meshes they were entwined, and he felt a great yearning to take the beautiful girl in his arms and pour into her ears the words of love that came to his lips.

It was the practical little Daron who brought them both back to the stern reality of the present.

"The interview must be short," he observed briskly, "there will be men outside counting the minutes till you leave. Every moment of your time will be accounted for to Cavara, depend upon it!"

"I dare say!" muttered Cottrell, and then he added more cheerfully: "We four must hold a council of war and try and decide on some concerted plan of action."

"I think I ought to tell Monsieur Henri," put in Marie, coloring deeply, "that Don Cavara wants me to be his wife; and when," she added with flashing eye, "I told him that his asking me was an insult, he simply smiled—oh, such a smile!—and told me I would yet change my mind!"

"Isn't it strange," she continued, after a pause, "to think that we are living in the nineteenth century, and that all about are cities and towns where people are doing as they please—enjoying their freedom, going to dances and the theater, and for drives in the park, while we are confined in a medieval castle by a half crazy Spanish outlaw, and God only knows what he means to do with us!"

"We won't wait to see what he means to do with us!" retorted Cottrell, with a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. "We shall be gone before he returns, and then we shall laugh at our strange adventures. Jean," he added, "are you quite sure that Cavara knows who I really am?"

"Yes, monsieur," was the reply, "beyond a doubt. He saw you but once; but his memory is good, and your disguise does not deceive him. He has ordered his men to keep a close watch on you till his return. I found this all out because I am not suspected or spied on."

"Our one chance, then, is to make an attempt to escape tomorrow night. This evening they would be too watchful."

As it evidently was the whimsical intention of Cavara that Cottrell's orders should be obeyed as long as they did not interfere with his own plans, the American decided to put Daron on guard at the postern on the following evening, and, to allay all suspicion, Manuel was to be ordered there for that very night.

It was arranged that Cottrell and the two women should start out at about eleven o'clock, if the coast were clear, while Daron was to remain and prevent pursuit for some hours; then he was to try to overtake them somewhere on the way to Bilbao, whither they would go, and then remain till Struthers should be informed of their whereabouts and come to the Spanish coast town for them in his yacht.

Various little details were arranged, and then Cottrell and Daron bade good night to the countess and left her.

Perhaps none of them slept much that night (except Daron, who never let troubles break his rest), but to two at least the hours brought thought, not slumber.

CHAPTER XXII.—THE LAUGHTER IN THE WOODS.

TEN o'clock the next evening found Daron on guard at the gate leading to the drawbridge over the cleft in the rock. Luck favored the plotters in that

it was a dark night. The men were in a great hall smoking and gambling, the air full of tobacco and the sounds of ribald song.

It wanted ten minutes to eleven when the two girls and Cottrell, all cloaked darkly, stepped cautiously out on the ramparts; without a word—simply a nod of the head—Daron noiselessly withdrew the bolts, and quickly the ponderous gate swung back on its hinges.

With a clasp of the hand each quickly passed by Jean and down the steps. The gate was closed and brave Daron continued to stand on guard.

"Whoever would have thought we could so easily have eluded Don Cavara?" whispered Marie de Villiers to the American.

"We are not out of the woods," replied Cottrell, with a shake of the head.

They had reached the great drawbridge. This was a difficulty that Henry had anticipated. The noise of lowering the structure was not to be thought of, so he had provided a couple of rough planks that he found in one of the turrets, and now it was the work of a moment to place them across the chasm.

It was no time for any formality. First Anne (for Marie would have it so) and then the countess were borne across the narrow way in Cottrell's strong arms. On the second trip Henry did not seem to realize when the plank had been traversed, but went carefully down the rough steps that followed, his burden still in his arms.

"Mayn't I walk now?" murmured a voice.

"Not yet," said Cottrell very decidedly; "it is too rough for your tender feet, my countess."

"But I'm awfully heavy," went on the voice.

"You're as light as a feather!" was the reply.

Marie made no more remonstrance, but settled her head on his shoulder again with a happy little sigh, that was scarcely audible.

They had reached level ground, and were just on the edge of the woods, the three walking single file, Cottrell leading, when suddenly in the stillness of the night there broke out a mocking laugh; another moment and the air seemed filled with the sounds of brutal mirth as though from a hundred throats.

The women clung to Cottrell in abject terror, casting frightened glances about them, in a vain endeavor to pierce the darkness.

"My countess," said Cottrell, with a groan, "try to be brave. I fear we have fallen in a trap."

Then innumerable torches flared up one by one, illuminating the woods, casting great, unnatural shadows about, and lighting up the evil faces of Don Cavara's band, as they closed in around the little group.

The next instant Cavara himself stepped forward and fixed his eyes on them, an evil smile on his lips.

"So you were going to leave my hospitable home without so much as bidding me good by. I call that unkind," he sneered.

Then his smile broadened, showing his gleaming teeth.

"We have been expecting you, though not quite so soon; we watched you as you came down those steps yonder. Really, monsieur, I quite envied you your burden; and the lady looked so contented!"

Despairing, beside himself with rage and hate, Cottrell made a dash for

the speaker's throat ; but Marie read his mad purpose, and throwing both her strong arms about his neck, she clung to him with all her might.

"It didn't hurt me—what he said—don't be rash ; he will kill you—for my sake, Henri—I love you."

It was a strange place to make such a confession, with this brutal, grinning crew of ruffians standing all about ; but it had the desired effect. Cottrell took the girl's hands in his and gently disengaged them from around his neck.

He was calm now, and he looked Cavara straight in the eyes, his face pale and set.

"I am powerless to defend this girl or myself against your insults," he said in a voice low but clear as a bell ; "but were you in my power I could not make you suffer more than you do. For in your heart the fires of hell are raging!"

It was a Parthian shot, and the Spaniard winced, his lips twisting in spite of himself.

This stranger had read his very soul, knew that beneath his mask of coldness his heart was burning with unsatisfied craving and ambitions, and that this man should lay it all bare and taunt him with it was a greater blow to the proud Cavara than if he had been struck in the face.

Suddenly the outlaw stepped up close to Cottrell, his face working horribly.

"For that," he cried harshly, "you shall suffer as few men have ever suffered. Here, men, bind this fellow and take him to the castle. Tonight he shall sleep in the Dungeon of Despair!"

CHAPTER XXIII.—THE SPELL OF A VOICE.

As the men deftly bound his hands behind him with the cruel, cutting cords, Cottrell stood as motionless as a statue ; and not unlike one he looked, with his face as white as marble, his clear cut features sharply outlined in the torchlight against the dark background of the woods.

Whether this man Cavara was going to do his worst, or was simply playing a ghastly joke, dictated by the grim humor within him, he could not determine ; but like a brave man, he meant to meet whatever fate held in store, as a gentleman and an American.

In fact, what might happen to him had ceased to trouble or even to interest him. The thing that brought anguish to his heart and made him grind his teeth at his own helplessness, was the thought of Marie and her fate.

What a miserable failure he had made of his attempt at rescue ; instead of releasing her from captivity, he had only opened the flood gates of Cavara's passion. Ah, well, he had tried his best, though futile his efforts.

If Dick Struthers would only appear ! He surely would not wait long. If no news came of him Dick would surely come to the rescue. Ah, that gave him an idea. Cottrell turned his head slightly till his eyes rested on the brigand chief.

"Don Cavara," he said, speaking with difficulty, for his throat was burning and his tongue was parched. "Don Cavara, I suppose you realize what it means if any harm befalls either the countess or myself? The authorities of

three countries, the United States, France and England, will have no rest till you and your men are smoked out of your haunts like a lot of wasps in a hollow tree. I have a friend, an Englishman of influence and means, who will move heaven and earth to get his hands on you and string you up for the black-guardly crew you are!"

Cavara shrugged his shoulders with satanic irony.

"Who can prove anything, or trace your coming to my place? And any way, I have a price set on my head already. They will probably increase the amount a little; that's all!"

"There will be no talk of proof when they run you down!" retorted Cottrell, reckless in his despair. "They will annihilate you all like the vermin that you are!"

A savage roar burst from the throats of the listening ruffians, but Cavara silenced it with a gesture.

"Lead him on to the castle!" he cried harshly.

Then, on a sudden, there was a rustle of skirts, and Marie darted forward and passed her hand through Cottrell's imprisoned arms.

"Henri, I am going with you," she said simply; "wherever they take you I shall go, too!"

"He makes a brave lover, my lady," commented Cavara, "but his way is not yours. Stand aside, if you please!"

But the girl clung the closer to Cottrell. He whispered in her ear not to defy Cavara. It would do no good. If she would show seeming submission, time would be gained, and little Daron might yet be able to help her.

"Desert you?" she answered, looking up at him with the love shining in her eyes. "Ah, you don't know me, Henri. I am a weak, timid creature no longer. For your sake, Henri, I am strong."

"God bless you, Marie!" cried the poor fellow, the sweat of anguish on his brow. "You shall stay with me and may God be with us!"

Just then one of the members of the band stepped up to Marie and put a great hand on her arm with the idea of drawing her away.

The girl shrank from him, while Cottrell stood bound and helpless. Suddenly an arm shot out and the fellow tumbled in a heap on the ground, and there stood Don Cavara, with eyes ablaze.

"You dog!" he thundered, kicking the body of the unconscious ruffian. "How dare you lay hands on the countess!" Then, turning about on the silent, astonished crowd, "I'll shoot the first man that puts a finger on either of these women!"

Cottrell knew not what to make of this sudden show of chivalry, but the countess knew, and with true womanly instinct she saw her chance.

"I thank you, monsieur!" she said to Cavara. "Though you have tried your best to conceal it, that act shows that at heart you are a gentleman."

Cavara flushed deeply, and his eyes dropped before her fearless glance. The men had all withdrawn a few paces and were leaning on their weapons, talking in snatches among themselves.

"If I could have had the love and help of a woman like you, I might have been a different man."

Cavara jerked the words out as though by some hidden power he had been forced to utter them against his will. His head had sunk on his bosom, and he stood motionless for a time. The countess stole closer to him. "Señor," she said softly.

The man started and looked up. In his eyes was a look of inexpressible melancholy.

"Señor, why not do a deed of kindness tonight that shall go far to wipe out the misdeeds of the past—set us free!"

The girl's voice of gentle entreaty thrilled Cottrell as nothing ever had; as for Cavara the words seemed to loosen the bounds of his passionate, devouring love for this beautiful gentlewoman, which was the one sweet thing that had ever come into his miserable life.

The fire of his southern nature broke through the man's schooled stoicism.

"I have got you now, and, by Heaven, I can't let you go!" he burst out suddenly, and he made as though he would take the girl in his arms. Marie sprang back.

"Señor!" she said in a voice that made Cavara stand and gaze in wonder. It was like the voice of an avenging angel. "You are not my master; you merely have the choice of two alternatives; you can set us free—both; or you can kill us—for it will be on your head whether we die by your hand or by our own. Only so far does your will prevail with us."

Cottrell, bound and helpless, had stood in an agony of suspense, not daring to speak, for he knew that their fate hung in the balance, and that the only earthly power that could move or influence Don Cavara was his love for Marie; and that was such a mighty passion that it seemed well nigh to have overcome all bounds.

Suddenly the girl drew herself up to her full height and pointed her small, slender finger straight at him. "Señor, God only knows what evil deeds you have done, what crimes you shall have to answer for; but if harm befalls my love and me through your cruelty, your base heartlessness, no peace nor rest shall be yours through all your miserable life. Through the hours of light and those of darkness you shall see me as you see me now, ever pointing at you the finger of warning—a warning that was heeded too late!"

The woman's voice rang out clear and sonorous. It was like the voice of an avenging angel, and each man gazed spellbound at the speaker or crossed himself in superstitious terror. Man they feared not; but this pale faced creature, with great eyes that shone with a light they could not read, awed and moved them all.

Cavara gazed at the beautiful, yet menacing, figure of the countess like one fascinated. She had gained the mastery; the man of iron gave way under the spell of her wonderful voice that sounded like a divine prophecy in his ears. In the weird light of the flickering torches she seemed scarcely human to his eyes, more like a vision. The brute passion of the man was suddenly transformed into a sort of adoration that seemed to lift him above his baser self.

Then, in an instant, he had drawn himself up and uncovered his head.

"My countess," he said hoarsely, "I shall ever see you before me as I see

you now, but your outstretched hand shall not mean 'too late.' It shall only mean 'farewell.'"

CHAPTER XXIV.—GOOD BY TO FRANCE.

EARLY one morning, just as the sun came peeping up over the line of the horizon, a party of four came toiling wearily along a stony, narrow road that lies at the base of the Pyrenees leading to the Spanish coast town of Bilbao. The four were the countess, Cottrell, Anne Trevoir and Daron.

A heavy farming wagon overtook them while they were yet many miles from the city, and on this rude conveyance the much fatigued quartet continued their journey to its end.

At Bilbao they learned of the Spanish-American War, and Cottrell took every precaution to conceal his real nationality, for the bitterness expressed clearly showed that an American would fare ill at the hands of the populace.

A telegram was despatched to Struthers, and three hours later an answering wire announced that the Albatross was on her way to Bilbao.

After twenty four hours of anxious waiting a fine gig came swiftly up the bay of Bilbao. In the stern sat the Honorable Richard Struthers.

All day long the four refugees had sat or strolled about the landing stage lest they might somehow miss the Englishman when he arrived. The loungers gazed with evident amusement at the warmth of the greeting. For these light skinned foreigners are generally so cold in their manner, you know.

As they boarded the Albatross, there stood Mr. and Mrs. Peters, with broad, welcoming grins on their honest faces, though poor Mr. Peters looked rather pale, as a result of his part in the attack on the chateau. Mrs. Peters took the two women under her sheltering wing, and they went below to their cabins, while Cottrell and Struthers promenaded the forward deck, for they had many things to talk over.

"What of Count Rignault?" asked Cottrell, eagerly, when they were alone. "Did you fight with him?"

"No," was the answer. "He saved me the trouble of killing him. He killed himself."

"Ah!" said Cottrell. It was not a very sympathetic "ah."

"And Louis?" continued Cottrell. "Have you seen anything of him?"

"Yes. He came back with a bandaged head and told a wild tale of having been beaten and robbed by bandits. The robbery seemed in some way to have greatly upset the count's state of mind. I think it led to his suicide."

"Very likely!" retorted Cottrell. "I was the robber, and the stolen articles were two letters that proved Lieutenant Rignault's villainy."

They talked on about their future plans, and, among others, how Henry and Marie had decided when they were married not to live in Santilly.

"We shall travel," said Cottrell, "and when our honeymoon is over, we shall settle in England, I think, to be near you, Dick. And honest Jean Daron will form part of our *menage*, you may be sure, and so continue to be a member of THE QUEEN'S BODY GUARD.

THE END.

A DASH FOR A THRONE.*

BY ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT.

Author of "By Right of Sword."

Being the recital of the many striking adventures that befell a man who died to one identity and entered upon another wherein he was called upon to assume still a third—How he became entangled in an intrigue whose goal was the throne of a kingdom, and the part he played in the plotting.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

A lieutenant of the Prussian navy, who tells the story, becomes involved in a quarrel with the prince, his future emperor. He finds, that to avoid disgrace by court martial, he must encompass his own death within a week.

Dr. Mein, an old friend, causes the young man to fall ill and apparently die. A mock funeral takes place and to the world he is dead. He goes on the stage under the name of Heinrich Fischer. Four years later Dr. Mein, having made him his heir, Fischer retires, not however before he has aroused the anger of a certain actress—Clara Weylin, who suspects some mystery in his past and swears to discover it.

While looking for some new career Fischer becomes identified as Herr von Fromberg, nephew of the Prince von Gramberg. As the real owner of that name denies his own identity through purely personal reasons, Fischer determines for the time to play the part.

On being conducted to the castle, he learns that the Prince von Gramberg has just died, making his daughter, Countess Minna, sole heir. Fischer soon finds that she is betrothed to the Count von Nauheim, one of his former enemies, and with this count he soon has a wordy tiff, becoming at the same time close friends with Herr von Krugen and Herr von Steinitz, two gentlemen who had been in closest confidence with the late prince.

Fischer finds that he is in the midst of a political intrigue to overthrow the mad king of Altenwald, and to put in his place the Countess Minna, who, her brother Gustav having been killed in a duel, is the rightful heir. Her future husband, the Count von Nauheim is keenly interested.

Fischer meets the Countess Minna and her aunt, the Baroness Gratz, rashly betraying his enmity to the Count von Nauheim.

He then goes in search of the real Von Fromberg, finds that he has become a Frenchman, changed his name of Henri Frombe and drawn up a declaration renouncing his heirship to the house of Gramberg. This document he gives to Fischer, whereupon the latter, making up his mind definitely upon the rôle which fate has thrust upon him, goes back to the castle as Herr von Fromberg.

CHAPTER V.—THE SCENT OF TREACHERY.

WHEN I reached the castle Captain von Krugen met me with several stories about steps which Von Nauheim had taken to contest my authority. Orders I had given had been countermanded, and several arrangements changed. These things were small in themselves, but as his object was evidently to fight my influence and dispute my authority, I deemed it best to put my foot down at once.

I sent for all to whom the contradictory instructions had been given, and
This story began in the December issue of THE ARGOSY. Which will be mailed to any address

on receipt of 10 cents.

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then requested Von Nauheim's presence. At first he would not come; and then I sent the captain to tell him exactly what I meant to do; and that if he did not come, every man and woman in the place would be warned to take no orders from him under pain of instant dismissal.

Von Krugen carried the message with glee, and it roused the count to such anger that he came at once in a fury. Without giving him time to speak, I said:

"I sent for you, Count von Nauheim, because these good people here are in some difficulty as to where they are to look for orders. Will you explain to them that although the prince has left his fortune to his daughter, the castle passes to me with the headship of the house, and that as at times like these there can be only one master, they must take their orders from me, and that where any instructions clash with mine, they must be referred to me?"

He eyed me angrily, but could not dispute what I implied.

"I am no mouthpiece for you," he answered sullenly. "I have been accustomed to control matters here, for an obvious reason known to every one—because I have the honor to be the Countess Minna's affianced husband. What object, then, have you for any change?"

"Will you tell them what I have said, or will you compel me to issue peremptory orders, and cancel openly what you have done?" I asked in a quick, resolute tone, but low enough to be heard only by him.

"If you dare to humiliate me in that way——" he began.

"Quick, decide," I interposed sharply. "There can't be two masters here."

He hesitated, glancing first at, and then away from me, while I kept my eyes fixed steadily on his face.

"Quick," I repeated sternly.

"Curse you; I'll make you pay for this," he swore under his breath, with a vicious scowl. Then aloud: "Of course you people will understand that for the moment the present prince here is your master," and with a wave of the hand he indicated me.

He did it as ungraciously as he dared, and as soon as he had finished he left the room.

The effect of the incident was twofold; it strengthened my authority in the castle, and made it more difficult than ever for me to draw back. But I had no thought now of doing that. I felt that I had cut off my retreat; and although I would much rather have told the Countess Minna exactly what my position was, any such candor was, for the moment at least, quite out of the question.

Of the girl herself I saw nothing during the next few days, and I passed the time absorbing all the information I could get, and trying to form a plan of campaign.

I guessed that nothing would be done by the agents of the Ostenburg family until a sufficient time had elapsed after the prince's funeral to make it plain what we intended to do; and I judged that their next move would be determined by our own acts.

The funeral took place and directly afterwards Von Nauheim left the

castle without acquainting me with his plans ; and for four or five days following the Countess Minna gave no sign of a desire to see me.

I began to grow impatient. I had no wish to force myself on her or into her confidence, but it was imperative that I should at least learn her wishes, both in regard to Von Nauheim and the scheme of which her marriage was a part. In the mean time Von Krugen was urging me to come to a decision to strike a blow which would show our friends in Munich that we were going on with the matter.

I had come to the conclusion, however, that there was no chance whatever of putting through any such plot as the old prince had attempted. If it had ever been practicable to carry it out successfully, the chance had passed when the son, Gustav, was killed.

Up to that time there had indeed been a pretty widespread sympathy with the movement ; and if a bold coup had been made, the lunatic king kidnapped, the young fellow proclaimed, and the prince's power, shrewdness, and enormous influence thrown into the scales, it was possible that enough strength might have been paraded in the country to force the hands of the imperial government.

But with the death of the son went half the support ; and now with the death of the prince I judged that more than half the remainder would go. It seemed to me, therefore, a sheer impossibility to carry such a scheme through successfully. The utmost I could hope to achieve would be to make such terms as should secure the safety of the Countess Minna, as well as of those who had been concerned in the plot thus far.

Obviously they were compromised up to the hilt ; and the manner in which Gustav's death had been compassed, showed that among the Ostenburg interest there were men of great daring and recklessness, ready to go to any length in defense of their own. They were on the winning side now, moreover, and I deemed it certain that to whatever lengths they might go, they were pretty certain to secure the covert sanction of the authorities at Berlin.

Berlin would side with the successful, I reckoned. Thus the more closely I probed the situation, the less I liked it.

But in these desperate circumstances, where each man who took a part was playing with his life, what was a coward like Von Nauheim doing? Even if he was angling to get possession of the wealth which would be the portion of the countess, he was not the man to run his neck into a noose ; and whoever married the Countess Minna would inevitably have as part of that dowry the implacable enmity of her enemies.

What then ought I to do? My instincts were all in favor of striking some kind of a blow, and of being the attacker, instead of waiting to be attacked. We appeared to be in danger of being squeezed out of existence.

Our supporters were falling away, our position growing weaker, and our resources becoming feebler the longer we waited. If we could only effect some little thing, it seemed that we should be in a better position to negotiate than if we merely did nothing. But what could we do?

There was another serious danger in delay, moreover, arising out of the consummate uncertainty of my own position. It was one thing to be mistaken

for the rightful heir to the prince, but quite another to attempt to make good that claim legally; and I soon had a sharp reminder of this.

The old lawyer who had acted for the prince came to me a few days after the funeral for his instructions. I expressed in a general way what I wished, and then he said:

"There are certain of the estates which have always gone with the title and should go now. It would be possible to make a claim to them against the actual provisions of the will." He put it suggestively.

"I shall make no claim," I answered. "I do not for a moment intend to interfere with the prince's disposition of matters."

"But he would have wished you to have them, I know. Indeed, I have letters from him to that effect."

"I shall not interfere with the will," I returned rather abruptly.

"They are very rich estates."

"That makes no difference to me."

"The cost of maintaining the dignity of your highness' title and position will be very heavy; and without them, scarcely practicable."

"I have my private fortune; and that will and must suffice."

"Indeed," he exclaimed in surprise. "I thought I knew to a mark the extent of your mother's small income. It is derived almost entirely from the Graffenheim property; and I understand that within the last few days you have ordered it to be sold. Do you not intend your affairs to remain in my hands?"

Here was clearly a mess I had not foreseen. The real man was getting rid of his German property when he turned Frenchman.

"You will certainly have my confidence, my dear sir," I said, in a carefully courteous manner. "And, of course, my affairs will remain in your hands. This, however, is only a very small thing, and I did not know of my uncle's death when I put it in hand."

"The prince was always desirous of purchasing that property, because, as you know, it lies in the midst of the Gramberg estates. If you wish to sell it I should advise the Countess Minna to purchase it."

"I shall not sell it to the Countess Minna," I said, at a loss how to parry him. "I mean that probably I shall withdraw it from sale altogether now."

He looked at me in such surprise that I saw he knew something which made my reply ridiculous; but being afraid to offend me, he said no more about it, and answered:

"That is, of course, just as you will. Then should I get on with the preparation of the papers of formal proof of your succession?"

"I don't know what is wanted," said I, indifferently, though the man's words had sprung a mine under my very feet.

"Mere formalities, of course; just tracing your descent. The certificates of birth and such matters."

"Oh, yes; whatever is necessary you may prepare. Will it take long?" His answer would tell me what time I should have for the whole business.

"No. A day or two, not more."

The reply filled me with consternation. I could not possibly make a legal

claim to what did not belong to me; and yet I must have time—weeks at least, and probably months.

I let no sign of my feelings show in my face, but sat impassively thoughtful. Then, as if debating a point, I answered:

"You will have to create some delay in the matter. It is useless keeping my confidence from you. This will of the prince's leaves me nothing but the castle; and that seems to have been about the only part of his property that he had mortgaged; so that practically there is nothing. Whether I shall accept the inheritance, therefore, and, of course, the title with it, is a question I have yet to decide; and I must have as long a time for that decision as possible—but, mark you, no one must know of this but yourself. This is my first confidential commission to you. Certain things might determine me at once, but marriages cannot be arranged in a week. You understand? And I have no fancy for the life of a man weighted with a big title, and no means to support it properly."

He bowed as if in acquiescence, although this glaring contradiction of what I had said only a minute before obviously perplexed and disconcerted him.

"And now that you have my confidence," I said, laying great stress on the word, "tell me how long can we postpone these formalities—or, in other words, how long can I have to carry out my—my plan;" and I smiled slightly as though the plan were some such matrimonial one as I had hinted at.

"A month, perhaps two months, without provoking much comment—of course, providing there is no opposition," he replied cautiously.

"I will find a way to deal with any opposition," said I promptly. "And now, we understand each other." With that I dismissed him.

I saw the danger of this new development. The least suspicion would inevitably cause inquiry; and the most superficial inquiry would as inevitably bring the whole house of cards tumbling about my ears. But I had certainly one month, and perhaps two; and I must put the time to the best use I could.

The question of what that use should be was considerably influenced by Von Nauheim, who returned that night and immediately sought an interview with me.

I noticed at once a marked change in his attitude.

"I want a confidential talk with you, prince," he said, "and before we begin I wish to say I am very sorry I made a bear of myself to you before the funeral. But I was frightfully upset at the prince's sudden death. It seemed to me that all our plans were going to the devil, and that it was impossible for a man who had had only a student's career like yours could be of any use in such a case as ours. I own that I tried to frighten you into leaving here without going into matters; and then it was I saw what a different kind of man you were. But I was too wild to own it."

"And what had changed you since?"

"I've been in Braunstadt in conference with our friends there to ascertain what effect the prince's death will have."

"Well?"

"Von Krugen tells me you know everything, and the long and short of it

is that if you'll join us, we shall all be only too glad to have your help. I need scarcely tell you that those who stand by us now will reap the harvest when we've succeeded. It's deuced hard on you to have the whole of the prince's fortune left away to Minna. Once this thing goes through, she won't want it, of course; and it'll be my business to see that the Gramberg estates go with the title. I give you my word on that."

The man was lying, of course; but it wouldn't do to show that I knew it.

"I don't think the terms are high enough," said I quietly, as if weighing them. "The risk is enormous."

"It might be, if we were not certain of success."

"And we certainly are not."

"Why, what can stand in the way. The feeling against the king grows every day. What do you think is his last freak? Another confounded palace; and this time underground. It will cost millions of marks—millions. Do you suppose the people are going to put up forever with this sort of thing? It has only just leaked out in Braunstadt, and I tell you, man, the whole country will take fire and clamor for his deposition. There never was such a chance, and never will be such another."

There was a ring of sincerity in this indignation quite foreign to his usual manner, and I could not understand it.

"And what is your plan?" I asked.

"To strike, and strike at once," he cried loudly, dashing his fist down on the table. "While Braunstadt is mad with anger."

It was plausible enough, but I knew the man for a scoundrel.

"And my cousin—what does she say?" I asked

"She can have no choice," he returned readily. "She must leave these things to us. She has a kind of reluctance, I know; and her heart has never really been in the work. But she is pledged to the finger tips and can't draw back—at least without betraying the lot of us, as well as ruining herself. Sometimes I wish indeed that she had more spirit. Had I known she felt so strongly, I should never have gone in so deep myself."

"Before I decide anything I must know her wishes," I said.

"Her wishes will be ours—if we make her understand that the alternative will be the ruin of all who have taken up her cause, and probably the death of every man here. Of course you'll force this home upon her?"

"It must first be forced home on me," said I.

"You know Von Krugen's views," he urged—he was showing too much earnestness now, and his whole demeanor was suggestive of a secret purpose. What it was I could not guess, of course; but no one could fail to read it in his manner.

"Yes, I know Von Krugen's views; but I am accustomed to form my own opinions and to act on my own judgment."

"If you will come with me to Braunstadt, I will give you plenty of facts to convince you." He spoke with an assumption of lightness in his tone and accompanied the words with a shrug of the shoulders, as of indifference. But the man was as easy to read as a book in some respects. I saw instantly that he had approached one of the chief points at which he had been aiming.

"Of course, I will go with you to Braunstadt," I answered readily; and a momentary flash of pleasure in his eyes gave me the clue I needed.

It was at Braunstadt that Minna's brother had been inveigled into the duel and killed—and this man had come back from there with some such plan against myself.

My death would leave the girl absolutely without a friend in the world.

The game was indeed becoming engrossing in its interest; and at that moment I began to see the course I would take to cut the coils which threatened her.

"Before I go," I added, after a pause that was scarcely perceptible, for all the revelation that had come to me in it, "I will see my cousin, and hear from her lips what she wishes."

"We will see her at once," he answered instantly.

"With your permission I will see her alone."

"That is rather a strange request, prince," he returned, "considering she is my promised wife. What reason have you for making it?"

"I wish her to speak freely to me, unfettered by either your or Von Krugen's insistent persuasions. She will speak more freely alone; and as head of the house I choose my own steps."

"I see no reason for it," he replied sharply. "Do you suggest I intimidate her?"

"I suggest nothing," I returned quietly. "I get my information in my own way, that is all. If you object to my doing that, I decline to get it in yours. My visit to Braunstadt can stand over meanwhile."

"But things can't wait. This business must be done at once."

"Then the short cut to it must be as I prefer to direct."

The mask nearly fell from him. He bit his lips, and I saw the anger rush to his eyes and face; but he checked it, and though he had to fight hard to keep from breaking out, he answered sufficiently calmly.

"Oh, if you set so much store by it as all that, certainly see her alone. You will find out no more than I have said."

But I had a different opinion; and I sent up a message at once to the Countess Minna, to ask her for an interview immediately.

"And when shall we start for Braunstadt?" I asked, when the messenger had gone. "Tomorrow?"

"The sooner the better," he replied; and again I caught a fleeting, stealthy glint of pleasure in his eyes.

CHAPTER VI.—MY "COUSIN."

My short conversation with Von Nauheim, the sudden change in his attitude toward me, and the slight indications of his real feelings which I had observed, did more than anything which had yet occurred to impress me with the deadly seriousness of the task I had undertaken.

I was convinced that as the result of this visit to Braunstadt some fresh development of treachery had been planned, and that he was closely concerned as either principal or tool.

Fortunately for me, he was a very poor diplomatist, and as my former knowledge of him gave me a sufficient clue to his real character, he could not so dissemble his manner as to mislead me. Without that clue he might have tricked me, of course, as he had tricked others.

Apparently his interests lay entirely in carrying forward the plot to place the girl he was to marry on the throne. He would certainly secure her fortune, while as her consort, he would enjoy a position of magnificent power infinitely alluring to a man of his nature. Moreover, he was the chosen representative of one of the most influential sections of Altenwald society, whose power must be an enormous factor in any struggle.

Then I had been a good deal impressed by his momentary flash of sincerity when he had been speaking of the king's mad excesses. He was then expressing a sincere opinion, I was sure; though whether his own or inspired by others for whom he was acting, I could not say. But the thought kept recurring to me with ever increasing suggestiveness.

The key to his conduct, I was convinced, lay in Braunstadt, and to Braunstadt I would go at any risk. That there would be a risk, a child could see; and the nature of it would depend on the character of this man's treachery, the people with whom he was coöperating, and the length they were prepared to go in silencing me.

I regarded it as quite possible that I should not return. If, as was supposed, the death of the Count Gustav had been deliberately planned, I might take it for granted that I should be pursued with almost equal hostility. This I had read plainly in the man's manner; and it prepared me to believe that he himself had in some way been connected with Gustav's taking off.

But there was another very serious consideration. If I was put out of the way and no one at the castle had proof of Von Nauheim's treachery, what would be Minna's position? Obviously it must at once become one of consummate peril.

Ought I to go away, therefore, without warning her of the man's true character; and without arranging some definite plan of action? Yet how was I to warn her without telling her what I knew and how I knew it; in other words, unless I took her into my confidence as to who I was?

It will be easily understood how these thoughts perplexed me as I made my way up the broad stairway of the castle to the room where she was to receive me; and how infinitely the embarrassment was magnified by the unwonted emotions which her presence now as formerly roused in my breast.

She greeted me with sweet cordiality; and the eyes which had an indescribable fascination for me, wore now an expression of almost anxious alarm as their gaze rested on my very grave face. The Baroness Gratz was with her, a circumstance which made me unwilling to speak plainly and added to my embarrassment.

I inquired after the health of the two and uttered one or two common-places, when Minna, after a pause, during which she had most attentively studied my looks, exclaimed:

"You have not come only to say these things, cousin. Your face tells me plainly enough there is something urgent."

"That is true. I have much to say that concerns you very closely." She was very quick and understood me.

"You wish to speak to me alone. I am sure you will not object, aunt, if my cousin and I speak together in the window there;" and she rose and walked toward a large bay window at the far end of the room and motioned to me to sit beside her.

The old baroness looked surprised and a little indignant. It was no occasion to stand on trifles, but I did not wish to offend her at a time when her help might be urgently needed, perhaps within a few hours. So I made a low, deferential bow and said:

"You will understand this rather unusual step, baroness, when I tell you that I have already declined to hold this interview with my cousin, even in the presence of the Count von Nauheim; and that my object is merely to have direct from my cousin's lips alone her wishes and intentions in the future."

"I understand, prince," she replied with her stately bow; but I thought I could detect some symptoms of alarm.

Whether this was merely awe of me, or the evidence of some other hidden fear, I could not decide. But the whole atmosphere of the place reeked so foully with intrigue, that I did not know whether she was true or in Von Nauheim's plot.

As I took my seat by Minna's side she welcomed me with a little smile which, sad and wan though it was, seemed like a messenger of confidence. Then she put a hand on my arm and said wistfully:

"You will treat me quite frankly, cousin? I have been relying on that so strongly."

"As frankly as I can. Moreover, it is your frankness that is to be tested. Do you think you can trust me sufficiently to do as you said when I saw you last—tell me the whole of your wishes unreservedly?"

"Certainly I will," she replied instantly. "I have been waiting to do so ever since the day of my dear father's funeral."

"I understood that I was to await some sign from you. You said as much," I reminded her.

"True; but your message to me, that you would seek an interview as soon as practicable, has kept me waiting till now. I have been impatient; but it does not matter now," she ended with a smile.

"Who gave you my message?" I asked. I had sent none, of course, but guessed that it was a ruse of Von Nauheim's to keep us apart while he was away in Braunstadt.

"The count himself," answered the girl in some astonishment, and with a look of quick suspicion. "Did you not send any?"

"There has been some misunderstanding," I said quietly. "But I was waiting to hear from you; and I was to the full as impatient as you could have been."

She cast her eyes down and frowned; and her little foot tapped quickly on the floor.

"It must be as you say—he misunderstood you; or else he was afraid of my speaking plainly to you while he was away."

The first sentence was spoken with hesitation, the second quickly and with a touch of indignation; and directly afterwards her pulse quickened, and she said volubly:

"Cousin Hans, I can tell you what I dared not tell my father—I am afraid of the count. You have asked me what I wish. I have two wishes—to be released from this marriage, and to stop all this hateful intrigue for the throne. I am not fit for it. I do not wish it. I am only afraid and harassed and distracted. Oh, I long with a regret I cannot put in words for the days of quiet and peace, when none of this was ever thought of. Then I had not a care or grief; and now life is all fear and sorrow. I am the most miserable girl on earth."

She lifted her hands and let them fall again on her lap with a gesture eloquent of despair, and now that her momentary excitement had passed, her voice grew heavy with the accents of sorrow.

I was silent, not quite knowing how to meet such an outburst of grief and confidence.

More than that, however, I had heard with a rush of joy which I dared not let her see, the outcry against the marriage. At that moment the feeling seemed to me like a guilty one; but I vowed to myself that if it cost me every drop of blood in my body, I would save her from it.

But I sat now, grave, silent and thoughtful, while the little pathetic glances of appeal for help which she cast at me shot right into my heart, and thrilled me till I could scarcely hold myself under restraint.

When I did not reply—and I did not because I dared not trust myself—she sighed deeply, and said in a tone even more despairing than before:

"I suppose your silence means that you also are against me. Oh, this ambition, what a curse it is! What has it not cost us? But for it my brother would be alive today. My dear father was just as surely another of its victims. I am forced to sacrifice all I care for and to wed a man whom I fear.

"And now you, fresh from a life of books, on whom I built so much, are caught by the same madness; the fever burns in your blood, and you join this mad hue and cry after ruin. Ambition—ah, my father often rated me for my lack of it; but what has it brought to us but death, and what does it promise but misery? Cousin Hans, I beseech you with all my heart and soul do not join with those against me. Try to see this with my eyes; and do not urge me. I know you will think me weak and a child, a feeble, helpless coward; but I cannot go on. You are now my only hope. Cousin, do say you will not side against me!"

As she spoke, her hands clasped my arm as if clinging to me for help, and she gazed into my face with such yearning appeal that had I been a stone, or the stern, self-contained man I had to try to appear, I must have been moved. And I was no stone where she was concerned.

"God forbid that I should force you," I said, my voice scarcely steady, despite my efforts to control it. "Do not doubt that I am with you in whatever you decide."

"Oh, thank God, thank God! How I have hoped it! Now, I have a friend indeed."

No words of mine can describe the radiant look that came to her face as she cried thus ; and the smile she gave me lives in my memory as one of the loveliest sights my eyes have ever beheld.

After this burst of emotion we sat silent some minutes ; she in all innocence of relief keeping my hand between her own two ; and I on my side drinking in until I was intoxicated with the sweetness of emotions such as had never stirred my heart before.

I made the first movement—a slight attempt to withdraw my hand. She let go, and then, with another smile of frank pleasure and trust she said :

“ Not only my cousin, but my friend.”

“ There is yet much to do,” I said gently.

“ But we shall do it together. I am no longer alone with all against me—even my dear father. Tell me what is first to be done? I know that you will be successful, for you have given me hope. Will you tell the Count von Nauheim that the marriage project is at an end ; or shall I? I will if you wish, though I have been afraid of him. But no longer, for you are on my side.”

Sweet as these renewed protestations of trust were to my ears and senses, they were not without embarrassment.

“ If you trust me, you will have to do so wholly,” I said. “ And you must do as I wish, even if it is altogether distasteful to you.”

“ I will do whatever you tell me,” she assented readily.

“ Then in the first place, we must act as if this conversation had altered nothing.”

“ Do you mean——?” she began with a frown of repugnance, and then stopped.

“ I mean that for the present your relations with the count must remain as they have been. Do not ask all my reasons. But for the present it is necessary that no one, you understand, no one shall have any thought that we are not going on with your father’s scheme.”

I told her then of Von Nauheim’s visit to Braunstadt and its result ; and that before we settled anything we must know more.

“ I should be deceiving you,” I added, “ if I did not tell you that grave risks have yet to be run in this matter, and the danger to some of us may prove greater than we can avert. I cannot tell you all my thoughts ; but I am going to Braunstadt.”

“ Ah no, not there, cousin. That is where Gustav was killed.”

“ They will not kill me,” I answered, smiling to reassure her. “ It is essential for me to go that I may probe certain matters to the bottom. Then I shall know better what to do for the best.”

“ You will never come back. They will not let you,” she wailed, wringing her hands.

“ We are not children to foster silly fears,” I said. “ Of course, there are risks in going, but there is certain failure if I do not go. And I go, forewarned by your brother’s fate to caution me to be wary ; and with the knowledge that you depend upon me to rouse my wits. Do not fear. I shall return and bring with me a plan of action. But if by any chance I should not, you will know there is danger for you.”

"I shall leave Captain von Krugen here; and if on any day he does not hear from me, that very day you and the Baroness Gratz must leave the castle under his care, cross the French frontier and fly to Paris. I shall leave full directions as to this with Von Krugen. From Paris your cause can be best fought. But, above all things, be careful not to let your whereabouts be known to any one except the captain. He will know from me how to act."

She sat trembling and agitated.

"Why not say at once that the marriage has been broken off, that the plot is abandoned, and cross the frontier immediately?"

"Because I hope to win our way to a far different ending than exile. That is well enough as the last resource of a helpless woman; but these men will find me—well, I will utter no big words till I know more and have done something. I am looking for a stroke of double cunning somewhere, and I do not expect to look in vain. In my view you are safe so long as these men believe we have no suspicion of them; but their attitude toward you may change in a moment.

"And now, remember, that even Von Krugen, honest and stanch as I believe him, must know nothing of our abandonment of the plot on which he has set his hopes. I am compelled to mislead even him; and the secret must be yours and mine—ours only. You promise?"

"From the bottom of my heart," she answered earnestly, putting her hand into mine. "When shall I see you again?" she added suddenly. "I can be brave when you are with me; and I will try not to play the coward in your absence. But"—with a sigh—"I have no friend but you."

"Yes, you have a stanch and brave friend in Captain von Krugen," I answered; "and I shall be back within a few days." I spoke cheerily and as though with absolute conviction.

"You have opened a new gate of hope for me, cousin," she said, as I rose from beside her. "But the thought of your leaving me is almost like shutting it again."

"It shall never be shut if I can help it, until you have passed through to a safe and happy life." I spoke earnestly as I felt, and with that I left her.

I had much to do before I could set out on my journey, and one matter especially troubled me. I must stop Von Fromberg from selling the property of which the old lawyer had spoken to me, and I was at a loss how to communicate with him.

Send a letter through the post I dared not; to go to him myself was impossible; yet whom could I trust to carry a letter or message. If the sale was not stopped, suspicion would certainly be created; and after much consideration, I resolved to word a guarded letter addressed to Henri Frombe, and intrust it to Steinitz. I had meant to take him with me to Braunstadt, lest I should need assistance; but this other matter was more urgent.

I sent for him now and charged him on his honor to take the letter, and place it himself in M. Frombe's hands, when no one else was present; to ask no questions and to answer none; but simply to bring back to me direct to Braunstadt the reply, and not to breathe a word to a soul about the mission.

"My life may depend on your loyalty," I said when I gave him the packet; "and probably also that of the Countess Minna; and most certainly the whole future of our scheme;" and I exacted a pledge of loyalty.

It was a risk, of course, but then, risks were all about me, and I could not avoid taking some; all I could hope to do was to select the smaller ones.

Then I had a close and, to a point, confidential conference with Von Krugen; and I explained clearly what he was to do in the event of anything happening to me at Braunstadt.

"If there is no treachery, there will be no danger in this journey of mine; but if there is, and I am only too sure of it, then we know that those who are playing traitor will try to get rid of me in order to render my cousin helpless and put her completely in their power. That you must prevent; and her safety will rest almost solely with you."

"But the Count von Nauheim?" he asked, in some surprise.

"You will trust no one but yourself, captain," I returned significantly.

"If I had proof that he was a traitor——" he growled.

"I am going to get proofs concerning everything. Unless this is all genuine, our scheme is bound to be shipwrecked."

His face grew very dark and lowering.

"My place is by your side in Braunstadt," he said.

"If I can find the traitors, you may share in their punishment. But meanwhile your place is here in Gramberg, to guard my cousin. And if you should have even a thought of danger while I am away, call me back at once. But if my calculations are correct, there will be no immediate danger for her."

"Your highness will not reckon on me in vain. But I would to God I could be with you there. You are taking your life in your hands, and ought not to go alone."

"If there is that amount of danger, better I alone than you with me; but I am well prepared, and shall not suffer things to reach that pass;" and I repeated at great length and detail all that I wished him to do in the event of his having to fly to Paris.

At the close of the interview he gave me a solemn pledge to carry out my wishes and showed many signs of loyal regard for myself, mingled with genuine anxiety as to the issue of this journey to Braunstadt.

Then I sent word to Von Nauheim that I should be ready to start with him on the following day; and I passed a sleepless, tossing night, seeking to piece together in a connected whole the fragments of the problem as I possessed them, and to estimate the actual perils and risks of what I knew must be an eventful journey.

CHAPTER VII.—AT BRAUNSTADT.

WHEN we started for Braunstadt it required very little observation to see that Von Nauheim was striving sedulously to conceal the fact that he attached such critical importance to my accompanying him. Indeed, had I had no prior knowledge of him I think his demeanor would have roused my suspicions.

"I suppose you will tell me what passed between you and Minna, yesterday," he said, when we were in the train. "You've produced a considerable change in her, for I found her much more willing to go on with us than she was before."

"I gave her to understand that very much must depend on the result of this journey. If I am satisfied that there is reason to hope for success, it will be at least an impartial opinion—for at present I have not much faith. And I suppose she attaches a great deal of importance to that."

"Did you urge her not to throw us over? I presume you did."

"Why should I? I am not convinced myself."

"Well, here are signs enough of the popular indignation, at any rate," he said, as he tossed me a morning paper with some very strong comments on the lunatic king's acts.

"Discontent is one thing, rebellion another;" I replied as I opened the sheet to read what he pointed out.

I had no wish to talk, but to think, and I made as though I were engrossed in the paper. My companion took another journal and played at reading it; but I saw him watching me every now and then, until the paper fell on his lap and he stared out of the window, obviously buried in his thoughts.

I knew the tenor of them later, when his face changed and he turned to speak.

"You will stay with me, of course, prince?" he said.

"Certainly," I replied readily, although half a hundred suspicions were started of his probably sinister motive for the invitation.

"It will be so much more convenient for our purpose than your going to the Gramberg town house," he said. "I've been thinking of the best course to take. What sort of proof do you wish to have to convince you that measures are ripe?"

"An interview with those who are to carry them out, of course."

"That will be best; and, fortunately, most of them are in Braunstadt. Then I presume you will be prepared to do what all the rest of us have done—take an oath of allegiance to the new queen?"

"When I join you, I will do whatever the rest do."

"We are all pledged to the hilt. Every man of us has made the oath and signed a declaration to uphold the good cause."

"Signed a declaration? That seems a strong step," I said, though all forms were pretty much the same thing to me.

"But a necessary one. There is no drawing back then," he answered.

"Well, I will sign what I see others sign and do what others do," I replied firmly. "But, understand, I must see these things done before my eyes." I said this because of an idea that flashed into my thoughts at that moment.

"You are disposed to be cautious to the verge of timidity, eh?" he sneered.

"I am resolved to satisfy myself," I returned; and for a reason that I kept to myself I rather liked the idea of what he had said. After a pause, he continued:

"Roughly, what I propose is this. I will take you round to introduce you to the more prominent men—in particular to Baron Heckscher, who is really the leader of us; and then we will have a meeting at my rooms, where everything can be explained and settled. What say you?"

"I agree; but, of course, I reserve my right to take any other step I may think necessary that suggests itself to me."

"Naturally, naturally," he exclaimed. "Now that the prince has gone, we are only too glad to have a cautious, calculating head to take his part."

The words were as false as the man. I read it in his tone and manner; and he was far more ready to curse me, had he dared, for my profession of caution. But I pressed it because I knew that this exaggerated carefulness was the best evidence of my seeming sincerity.

A long silence followed, during which I weighed carefully all he had said. His manner in speaking of these details was tinged by a singular nervousness; he blurted out his points like a man who has received a task which has overweighed him. And he suggested to me the condition of a poor actor who has had his part drilled into him by a subtler hand, and says his lesson badly.

Presently he began again.

"Of course, you'll understand we are all putting ourselves into your hands and in your power in this matter; and the more so with every additional step we take." He was coming to another point in his lesson, I thought. "You will give me your solemn pledge not to divulge a single name you hear, or a single fact that is told to you. If you'll do that now, I'll give you an outline of our plans at once."

"You can tell me as much or as little as you please. I pledge my honor to use nothing, except as the interest of my cousin may require—and that I presume is the intention of all concerned."

He frowned and bit his lips and thought a moment.

"Of course that's the intention; what else could it be?"

"Then if you want me to join you, you must trust me; otherwise, I may as well go back to Gramberg at once. But, of course, my return will be the signal for throwing the whole thing up at once. It is for you to choose."

"I had better tell you," he said, after another pause. "Things are nearly ripe; almost as forward as when that hot headed fellow, Gustav, wrecked everything by losing his temper, and getting involved in that duel."

"We have resolved to take up the prince's scheme pretty much where it was dropped. In a fortnight's time there will be an excellent time for striking the final blow. We have friends in all the public offices; several of the ministers themselves are ready to welcome the change; the whole bodyguard of the king at the palace is practically composed of our men; and everything promises success."

"The king will be at the palace, and we have arranged that a great fancy dress ball shall be given on a certain night. His lunatic majesty is, as perhaps you know, rather madder on that subject than on any other; and he delights in dressing himself up in half a dozen different costumes in the course of a single night to perplex, as he thinks, all who are present, and get at the real sentiments of his people about him."

"But his attendants always arrange that his costume shall bear a certain mark by which he will be known. In this way the ass of a king is fooled to the top of his bent, and instead of hearing genuine opinions about himself hears only those which are carefully tuned for his ears. Well, our scheme is to have his royal mark worn by some one who is not the king; to have the king himself seized and placed under restraint, to let Minna be at hand at the ball, and as soon as it is known that the king has gone, to proclaim her there and then."

"An ingenious scheme, so far as the easy part of abducting the king is concerned," I replied. "But the difficulties only begin when he is out of the way. What are you going to do with him—kill him?"

"No, there will be no bloodshed. There is no need. The whole country is ready for the abdication; nine tenths of the best men are on our side, and the other tenth will come in; and to give the thing plausibility we are going to have a sort of drama at the ball, in which the king—the sham one, of course—will announce the abdication and appoint his successor—Minna."

"The act of abdication will be written, and on examination will be found to be actually in the handwriting of the king himself. The whole scene will be described to the country as an actual occurrence; and this will be on the authority of the foremost men in Altenwald—a sort of informal council of state. It will be a definite and formal abdication. That of itself will silence opposition and carry the people, who are too eager to need much argument."

"And the king himself?"

"He will simply be put where he ought to have been long enough ago—under restraint."

It was a clever plot, and given the power behind those carrying it out, as likely to be successful as any that human wit could have devised.

"But what of the Ostenburg interest?" I rapped out the question sharply, with a keen, quick glance; and for a moment it seemed to disconcert him slightly.

"We do not put their power very high," he said then. "They think our chances ended with Gustav's death, and that now, the old Prince has gone, there is no one to carry the thing a step farther. But we must, of course, lose no time, and must strike before they even think we are contemplating any action at all. We shall catch them utterly unprepared; and in a thing of this kind, to be unprepared is to lose."

"Do you mean you think they will surrender their claim to the throne without a struggle of any sort?"

"No! but they can do nothing when once we are in possession."

"But the imperial authorities at Berlin, man?"

"The one consideration there is the *de facto* argument. Let us get possession, backed by formal abdication, and the actual document appointing Minna to the succession, and Berlin may do what it likes. They will think twice before risking a civil war to maintain the rights of a lunatic. At least, so longer heads than mine hold, and I agree with them."

"Well, I shall see;" and I was bound to confess to myself that if everything was genuine, the inference he drew was right. I knew enough of the sort of argument that weighs at Berlin to be sure of this.

But was it genuine? If not, where was the flaw? And all the rest of the journey I sat pondering this part of the problem, and reviewing again and again all he had said.

I was much impressed by it.

Two points in particular stood out boldly in my thoughts. If this plot could be carried through, as I was half inclined to believe it possible, Minna could make far better terms if she still wished to recede, when success had been attained, than she could at present.

If there were at the back of the scheme all this influence of which Von Nauheim had spoken, it would be a dangerous thing for her to throw over those who had supported her without securing at least their safety as well as her own. That would be dishonorable and cowardly, and I knew she would not consent to such a course. If these representations were correct, therefore, I began to fear that Minna had been too far pledged to be able to draw back at this juncture. We must go forward until the best terms could be made.

But against this I knew that the man who was giving me the information was as false as hell itself; and even while I sat meditating and brooding over what he had said, I caught the swift, searching, cunning glances which he darted every now and then at me, as if to see how far he had fooled me.

It was in this mood of fresh doubt that I arrived at Braunstadt and drove with him to his rooms. The sumptuous comfort and costly appointments of these surprised me.

When I had known him years before, he had had but scanty means, and his family were comparatively poor. Yet these rooms of his were fit for a man of the largest fortune. Even this circumstance added to my suspicions. If he was a traitor, he was being well paid for his treachery.

The journey with me in the train, and the fact that he was now in his own house seemed to put him more at his ease.

"I shall have to leave you for a considerable time, prince, while I prepare our friends for your visit," he said; "but you will, of course, consider this quite as your own home. This evening, or probably tomorrow, we can get to work. In the mean time, if you do not already know Braunstadt, you will find no lack of interesting sights."

For the rest of that day I was left to my own devices, and we did not meet until late in the evening, when he told me his plans for the next day, and that he had arranged for a round of interviews with the leading men on our side.

The result of these was only to increase my perplexity. Wherever I went I was welcomed cordially; my coöperation requested; my caution approved, and the most complete assurances given to me on all points. Had the success of the scheme depended entirely upon my joining it, I could not have been more warmly greeted.

I could not understand it in the least. Every question I asked was answered, as it seemed, quite fully and frankly; and every investigation I made only convinced me that the ramifications of the plot were vastly wider than I imagined, and that the prospects of success were enough to force me to believe in it.

And yet I could not shake off my suspicions. I could find no ground for them, other than my knowledge of Von Nauheim. There was nothing but that to warrant them. But the more closely I watched him, the more uneasy I became and the more convinced that he at least had some double motive.

I was in the position of a man who is being persuaded to a course he dislikes, against every prejudice and instinct of his nature, and despite his earnest desire to trust his instinct. I did not wish to find the affair genuine, but I could find no flaw anywhere, probe, search, suspect, and investigate as I would.

At the end of the fourth day I could not deny they had a right to ask for a definite decision from me to throw in my lot with them; and while I was dead against doing so, I could not suggest a single reason of value and force for my opinion. The meeting to receive my decision was fixed for the sixth evening, and I looked forward to it with considerable apprehension.

The previous day I resolved to use for a purpose that was almost as critical as the object of the visit to Braunstadt. It was an inquiry that I alone could make as to Von Nauheim's past.

I knew that in the days when he had dealt his dastardly injury on my family he had a wife, whom he married secretly, living in Thuringia. I was almost alone in the knowledge, which I had gained by accident; and my purpose now was to ascertain if she was still alive.

Fortune favored my investigation. The wife was still in the town, living in a humble way as a shopkeeper, and still ignorant of the real position and character of her husband.

I had no difficulty in finding her, and, using part of my knowledge of years before, I had some conversation with her and her two children, eliciting the fact that she had not seen Von Nauheim for years, did not know whether he was alive or dead, and did not care. She was earning her own living and educating her children, and prayed only that she might be troubled by the man no more.

It was not my cue to stir muddy waters. All I needed was to know where to put my hand upon her at any moment it might be necessary to spoil the scoundrel's schemes.

The villain meant to deceive Minna von Gramberg as he had deceived my sister years before, and my thoughts about him were bitter and black and wrathful as the train whirled me back through the summer night to Braunstadt. But I was jubilant, too; for I held the knowledge that must inevitably frustrate his scheme; and I resolved that I would use it at the forthcoming meeting, if no other reason suggested itself, to refuse to go forward any further.

It was, of course, an ample reason for such refusal; and as I had the proofs so fresh in my hands, there was not a man of honor in the affair who would not say I was doing right.

But events were to happen destined to change all this current of my thoughts.

When I reached Braunstadt it was late, but a mild, soft night, and I loitered through the deserted streets on my way to Von Nauheim's house, enjoying the walk.

I had to pass through one of the outlying parts of the city, and I was walking very slowly, thinking and smoking, when I was startled by a loud and sudden cry for help that came from some distance ahead of me.

I am a swift runner, and I set off at my fastest pace, the cry, which was repeated, being my guide. I passed two or three streets, crossed a broad, dark square, and then I heard the cry for the third time, and with it the sounds of men struggling and fighting, and the clash of steel.

I had no weapon with me save a stout oak stick, but I gave no thought to my own danger as I rushed on and sent up an answering shout to let it be known that I was at hand. As I reached the other side of the square, I came suddenly in full view of the disturbance.

Four men, two armed with swords and two having knives, were attacking one man, who, with his back to the wall, was fighting for his life like a demon, parrying, lunging, and thrusting with amazing dexterity and skill. He had been wounded, however, I could tell, and although he had wounded more than one of his assailants, he was in a very fair way of coming badly out of the fight.

Fired by the infernal cowardice of the four men in setting on one, I let out an oath, and grasping my stick with both hands, I clenched my teeth and rushed upon the villains from behind.

I brought the heavy knob of my stick down with crushing force upon the arm of the man nearest me, making the arm drop nerveless by his side, and sending his sword clattering down on the stones; and then I turned and smashed it into the face of a second man, who made as if to attack me.

At the same instant he who had been assailed in the first instance drove his sword through a third; and seeing this unexpected turn given to matters, the fourth ran away—an example which the rest followed.

"You came in the nick of time, friend," said the man coolly, coming toward me. "Another two minutes or so and these beasts would have done—What! Heinrich Fischer!" he cried, in a tone of the greatest astonishment, holding out his hand. "This is well met indeed."

I did not think so; for it was with something akin to dismay that I recognized a fencing master, named Guion, with none too savory a reputation, from whom in the days of my play acting, I had taken lessons. I gave him my hand, but I could not make the clasp cordial.

"How came you in this plight, M. Guion."

He laughed.

"Guion? Was that my name then? French, I suppose. By the body of the devil, I have such a lot of names and countries I can't remember them all. But I only use one at a time, and now, my good sir, I am a Corsican, and my name is Praga, Juan Praga, at your service, and not ashamed to own that I owe you my life. But what's the matter with you?"

"Praga!" I cried. "So it's you, is it, who fought the young Count von Gramberg and killed him?"

"Ho, and what in the name of the devil's skin do you know about that? But it's true—and it's equally true that tonight's business is part of the result. But by the blood"—and his face snarled like an angry dog's—"I'll make them pay."

"I can help you to your revenge," I said impulsively. "Let's go where we can be alone."

He stared at me as if in the greatest astonishment, then shrugged his shoulders, laughed, swore copiously, and then laughed again and said:

"You? Well, you've saved my life, so it's only fair you should do what you please with it. Come along with me." And he led me away, vowing and protesting by all the saints in and out of the calendar, that all he had in the world, whether purse, sword, or life itself, was at my absolute disposal.

CHAPTER VIII.—PRAGA'S STORY.

My thoughts, as I walked with my devil-may-care companion to his rooms, were busy enough. How could I get out of him what he knew, without compromising myself, and how explain that I was no longer Heinrich Fischer, the actor, but the Prince von Gramberg, without starting his suspicions?

My hasty exclamation, that I could help him to his revenge, had been exceedingly foolish; and I was at a loss to know how far I could trust him to keep any secret.

He took me to his rooms, and very comfortable quarters they were. I noticed that he was far better dressed than I had ever seen him in Frankfort.

He was a dark, swarthy, lean faced, lithe fellow, and his black eyes, keen and daring, noticed my look of questioning surprise, and he laughed, showing his gleaming white teeth in the lamplight.

"Not the first time I owe my life to that little fellow," he said, laying his swordstick, an ordinary looking stout malacca cane on the table. "A workman should never travel without his tools; remember that, my friend. And so, you are surprised to see me so comfortably placed, eh? Well, I am a man of means, and live at my ease—at least, I was. But shall I tell you?"

"By all means," said I, throwing myself into a chair, anxious to get him to talk freely.

"First, let us drink; and I may thank the Holy Virgin and you—but especially you, I think—that my throat is still sound enough to swallow good liquor. The one thing in life the loss of which makes one think of death regretfully." And he tossed off a glass of wine.

"Are you not wounded?" I asked.

"A scratch, somewhere on my arm; may God blight the hand that dealt it." He changed in a moment from a light tone to one of vehement passion; and then as quickly back again to one of cheery chatter. "If he doesn't, I will; so that's settled. Let's see the scratch, though."

He took off his coat, examined the hurt, and I bathed it, and bound it up carefully. "A mere nothing," he said, "for me, that is—not for him."

For a moment or two he moved about the room as if occupied, and then he turned to me, and with a light laugh, but a piercing look from his dark, glittering eyes, he asked:

"And now, tell me, who are you?"

"The Prince von Gramberg," I answered instantly.

I was indeed half prepared for the question, for I had been studying him carefully. The answer pleased him.

"Good. You are not afraid to tell me the truth. But I knew it. You had been pointed out to me here in Braunstadt—pointed out do you understand, for a purpose. And I said to myself, the Prince von Gramberg and Heinrich Fischer are the same person. Why? And when I could not answer the question, I thought to myself, I will wait. Here is a secret. It may pay me to keep my tongue still. So you see I know you."

"You were going to tell me about yourself. That will interest me more than your speculations as to my reasons for turning actor for a year or two." I spoke with an air of indifference.

"The canaille!" he exclaimed angrily with a bitter scowl. "They were sick of me. I know too much. I am dangerous. I will no longer do their work; and so, by the fires of hell, they think to get rid of me. Wait, wait, my masters, and you shall see what you have done."

He threw his right arm up and clenched his fist with a most dramatic gesture.

"It was surely their evil genius sent you my way just now. Do you know how near death you are at this moment?" he asked; "or you would be, if I had taken up their cursed work?"

"I shall know a great deal better if you will speak clearly," I replied, not letting him see how his question surprised me.

"I will. I don't know whether you wish me to regard you as prince or play actor; but whichever it is you saved my life tonight, and if I turn against you, may I go to hell straightway."

"You can please yourself what you call me. I am Prince von Gramberg in fact, whatever I may have seemed formerly."

"And I am Juan Praga, the Corsican. Not French, or Italian, or German, or any of the dozen different damned parts I have played; but Juan Praga, the Corsican. I left Frankfort before you did—about eighteen months ago—and I wandered about the country till my reputation as a fencer, and my lack of it in other things, first set me up as a master in Berlin, and then brought these devils to me. They approached me slyly, stealthily, like cats, flattering my skill and saying there was good work for my sword. And with lies they brought me here to Braunstadt.

"I knew nothing except that there was money to be made, and the life of a man of pleasure to lead. I suspected nothing; even when one of them came and told me my skill as a swordsman had been called in question, my honor impeached, and myself charged with being an impostor; and that if I could not clear myself, I must be off for a rogue."

"I begin to see," I exclaimed, when he paused.

"Yes, yes, you will guess what it meant," he replied, nodding his head vigorously. "But I could not then. And it came out gradually that the man who had dared to say this was young Count Gustav von Gramberg. I demanded to meet him face to face and give him the lie. Reluctantly, as it seemed—by the nails of the cross, it was the reluctance of infernal traitors—they agreed, and promised that we should meet. Then they fired him with wine and fed him with a lie about me; and when we met we were like two tigers thirsting to be at each other's throats. You know what happened," he

exclaimed, throwing up his hand again. "We quarreled, I struck him, he challenged me; and when we met I ran him through the heart."

"It was murder for you to fight a man like that with swords," I cried sternly.

"It was murder, prince," he answered slowly. Then he added with voluble passion, "deep, deliberate, cold blooded, damnable murder—but I was not the murderer. Mine was the hand, but theirs was the plot—and I never realized it, till they came to me and told me that they had planned it every detail and step, that I was in their power; and that if I dared to falter in any order they gave me, they would have me charged openly as a murderer and swear to such a story as would have me on the scaffold in a trice. What could I do? I was powerless. I raged and swore, and cursed for an hour; but they had me fast in their clutches, with never a chance of escape. But they did not know me."

He broke off and chuckled with demoniacal cunning, filled himself another bumper of wine, and drained the glass at a gulp.

"What did you do? And who are the men?"

He looked round at me with a leer of triumph, and spreading out his hands with a wide, sweeping gesture, he laughed and said:

"I spread a net, wide and fine and strong, and when all was right I baited it for a coward—a thin blooded, hellish coward—and I caught him. You know him well enough; and if you saved my life just now, I can save yours in return. I snared him here to these rooms, with a lie that I was ill and dying and wanted to make my peace with Heaven and confess; and he came running here in white livered fear of what I should tell. That was ten days ago; and in the mean time, for weeks and months I had been probing and digging, and spying and discovering, till I had such knowledge of their doings as made a tale worth one's telling to any inquisitive old fool of a priest—and I let my lord, the count, have an inkling of this."

He leaned back, laughed, and swore with glee.

"He came. I was in bed, all white and shaking;" and he illustrated the words with many gestures; "and my voice was feeble and quavering—like a dying Pantaloon's, as I gurgled out what I meant, and said I have written everything on a paper. You should have seen his eyes glint at this. He urged me to be careful, not to speak too freely; and he asked to see the paper. I told him it was in a desk, and when he went to get it and his back was to me, I was out of bed and upon him in a trice. I thrust him back into a chair and stood over him with my drawn sword, vowing by all the calendar that I would drive it into his bowels if he dared to so much as utter a squeak; and I meant it, too."

"Well?" I cried impatiently, when he paused.

"Ho, but your white livered, pigeon hearted, sheepish coward is a pretty sight when his flesh goes gray, and his haggard eyes, drawn with fear, stare up at you from under a brow all flecked with fright sweat. I wish you could have seen him. Well, I held him thus, told him all I knew, and made him write out a confession of the true means by which the young count had been lured to his death, the object of it all, and the story of the double plot this

treacherous villain is carrying on. I had found out much, guessed more, and made him fill in what I didn't know. More than that, too, I made him promise me certain definite rewards when the plot succeeded, and to take me in with the rest as one of them—to work with them now and share with them afterwards."

"You are one of them?" I cried.

"You saw the answer to that tonight by the old church. They played the game shrewdly enough. When I had let him go, one or two of the others came to me and wished me to attend a meeting. I promised; but I am not a lunatic, if their fool of a king is. No, no; I would not. Then they changed, and said there was another quarrel to be picked—with you, my friend; to send you to call on the young Count Gustav. But I said no; that you were a great swordsman, better than myself, which was a lie, of course—but lies are everywhere in this Braunstadt—and that I would not meet you. So they will find some other end for you. Then the next little friendly attention for me was the interview which you interrupted tonight."

The effect of this recital upon me, so quaintly and so dramatically told, may be conceived; and I sat turning it over and over, and judging it by the light of what I myself already knew.

"And what are you going to do now?" I asked at length.

"Sell what I know to the best purchaser—unless you can do what you said, help me to my revenge. I know you are in this; though you little guess the part they have cast for you."

"What's your price? I can take care of myself," I answered.

"Revenge is my chief point. I am a Corsican; and by the Holy Tomb, I'll never stay my hand till I've dragged the chief villain down."

"You mean?" I asked.

"That snake, Von Nauheim—the Count von Nauheim. The honorable count, a member of the aristocracy. A lily livered maggot." He changed from irony to vehement, ungovernable rage with swift, tempestuous suddenness.

"To whom will you sell your secret? The Ostenburgs?"

At the mention of the name he turned and looked at me intently, the light of the lamp throwing up the strong shadows of the face; and he stood staring thus for a full minute. Then he laughed.

"So you haven't guessed the riddle yet, eh? You're a deal simpler than I thought." He came close to me, sat down, and put his face right into mine, turning his head on one side and closing one eye with a gesture of indescribable suggestion. "Have you never asked yourself how it was that with all these people so dead set on putting a Gramberg on the throne, they should take the trouble to get the heir of that renowned family killed?"

"Yes, it was done because the Ostenburg agents got wind of the plot."

"Pouf!" He laughed in my face and threw his hand up, and then rose and filled himself another glass of wine, tossing it off like the rest.

"You can play a good game, no doubt, prince, but you don't know the cards you hold. If your young relative was killed by the Ostenburgs, what the devil's hoofs was Von Nauheim doing in that boat? And what the devil's

tail does he want to set me on to you for? Does he think the Gramberg chances are to be improved by first killing off the heir and then getting rid of you, the girl's chief protection? I know all about Minna von Gramberg, and the plot to put her on the throne. I know this, too—that she has no more chance of sitting on that throne than I have of eating it. Body of Bacchus, man, these are foul fiends you are leagued with and want knowing."

I began to see everything now, and my pulses quickened with excitement; I guessed what was coming.

"What is your aim in all this?" he asked suddenly.

"I have come to Braunstadt to see exactly how matters stand."

"And nicely they've fooled you, maybe—or at least they might have done so if you hadn't been lucky enough to be within sound of my shout tonight. I'll give you the key to the whole thing. There's a plot within a plot, and all you Grambergs are being fooled. This type of innocence, Von Nauheim, is the tool of the Ostenburg interests. The indignation against the king is all genuine enough; the people would welcome his abdication tomorrow, and wouldn't seriously concern themselves even if the abdication came by way of a dagger thrust or a pistol bullet.

"But the Ostenburg faction dare not force the abdication for two reasons. Because, in the first place, the people on your side are strong enough to make a fight of it; and, in the second, if a fight did not come, no one can say what line the people at Berlin would take. It is quite possible that they would swoop down and clean both sides out. What these precious Ostenburgs have to do, therefore, is to get the crown without a suspicion of treachery." He broke off with another of his sardonic laughs, and took more wine.

I did not interrupt, and a moment later he continued.

"Then came your old prince as a stalking horse. He wanted to make a grab for the throne, fostered the discontent and rebellion, put his son forward and sounded the people here as to his chances. The Ostenburgs knew of it directly, of course, and laid a clever, devilish plot to profit by it. A large number of the wealthiest and most influential supporters appeared to favor your Gustav; they warmed; made indirect overtures, and then went over in a body, making it a condition that the man they put forward as one of their leaders, Von Nauheim, should marry your old prince's daughter. By the bag of Iscariot, a shrewd stroke. The prince saw nothing and agreed—and that's the reason of that love match."

"A damnable scheme," I exclaimed between my teeth.

"Wait, wait," he said calmly, laying a hand on my arm. "Your Gustav was in the way, and it is a canon of the Ostenburg code that there shall be no Gramberg claimant to the throne alive, or at any rate fit to claim it. So the quarrel and the duel were engineered, and there remained only the Countess Minna. Then they had a stroke of luck—the old prince died—and the girl alone remained, helpless and friendless, except for you. Your turn will therefore come; and then this is the plan.

"The plot to place the Countess Minna on the throne will go forward gaily, is going forward now, in point of fact. But—and mark this carefully—at the critical moment your Countess Minna will have vanished; and then see the

position. The mad king will be gone, the throne will be vacant; the cry of the conspirator and of Braunstadt will be for the new queen—and there will be no queen to answer. What next? Why, that the thoughts of all men will turn to the Ostenburgs—the loyal, faithful, true, innocent, do nothing Ostenburgs, and the Duke Marx, their heir, will consent, when the matter is forced upon him by the united populace, to mount the throne.

"No taint of suspicion against him; no thought of treachery; actually an opponent of the movement against this mad royalty; a staunch upholder of the right divine of monarchs; he will be hailed by all as the only possible successor to a king who cannot be found—and Berlin will rejoice to see an ugly trouble got over in this easy fashion. Now," he exclaimed, with a grin full of meaning; "you can see much where before you could see nothing at all."

"And what of the Countess Minna?"

He paused and then answered in a low, guttural voice, and with a look of deep, suggestive meaning.

"Von Nauheim will see to that. There is something in regard to him I do not know, but I do know that married to him she would be impossible for a queen, for he is of the scum of the gutter, and there is worse behind, I believe. But Von Nauheim is no stickler for ceremonies. He may not marry her at all; and ruined by him, you can guess what her chances of the throne would be."

"Hell!" I cried, jumping to my feet in fury. He had got inside my impassiveness now, and I was like a madman at the thoughts he had raised. "I must see you tomorrow. Ride ten miles out on the Linden road and wait for me at noon. I shall go mad if I stay here longer;" and I rushed away.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE 7.45 EXPRESS.

BY FRANCIS CHURCHILL WILLIAMS.

The sequel to a discussion on train robbers—What the brave one did in an emergency, and what the smart one was compelled to put up with as the price of his conquest.

TWO men were sitting in the smoking room of a London club. One, a tall, athletic looking fellow with black hair and clean cut features, was slowly blowing rings of smoke in the air as he lay back in the big armchair.

The other man, slight and clean shaven, with a singularly mobile face and twinkling gray eyes, was looking over a daily paper. Between them was a small table furnished with a couple of stands of club soda and a decanter of brandy, which gave signs of having been well used.

"Gerald," said the small man all at once, dropping the paper into his lap, "what do you think of train robbers?"

The tall man looked up in lazy surprise. "Toppy Russel," he drawled, "now, what in the name of all that's wonderful ever put such a question as that into your head?"

"The paper," explained the other; "and seriously I ask you, what do you think of train robbers?"

"And just as seriously I reply," returned the tall man, "that I think the fellows who strip you of your watch and valuables, and depart with your Gladstone or portmanteau, are clumsy rogues at the best. And the people they rob—well, they are a shade less admirable; for in every case I have heard of they appear to have acted like cowards or fools, and a rogue's always preferable to either of these, to my mind. And now that you have my candid and, doubtless, authoritative opinion on train robbers, please finish that B and S and try one of these cigars; they are worth trying, if I say it myself."

"Only one more question," said Russel, as he took the proffered weed. "You laugh at the way railway travelers act in these little affairs. Now, how would you act? Suppose a fellow were suddenly to put a pistol to your cheek and insinuate a desire for your watch! No one is near. You are alone in the carriage. What would you do?"

"I'd knock the pistol out of his hand, while pretending to comply with his demand, and throw him out the window after it."

Caruthers said this quietly and determinedly, and Russel knew him too well to suspect braggadocio, so he only laughed lightly at his companion's emphatic reply, and proceeded to envelop himself in clouds of smoke.

"Well," said the tall man, looking at his watch and starting up; "I must be going. The express starts at 7.45, and I've to stop at a couple of places before making the station." And he rang for his bag and overcoat.

"Now, Gerald Caruthers," said his companion, as Gerald was being helped into his coat, "remember what you have told me. If I hear of any attempt at train robbery on the 7.45 express I shall not write to you, but shall at once have the track examined, and the body of the robber discovered and interred. I suppose you will be willing to do that much for your victim, won't you?"

"Oh, certainly," laughed Caruthers, and the next moment he had wrung Russel's hand and had gone.

At the station he secured a first class ticket, and then set about to find an empty compartment if possible.

As luck would have it, the second coach he looked into was unoccupied, and he quickly stored his portmanteau away and, settling himself luxuriously in the corner, uttered a silent prayer that no one would come in to interrupt, with the usual traveler's commonplaces and platitudes, the nap he had in prospect.

He looked at his watch; only one minute remaining till train time, and already he heard the doors being banged to as the guard went his rounds.

And then—then, just as he was putting his watch back into his pocket with a breath of relief, the door of the compartment was suddenly jerked open and, framed in the narrow opening, appeared the figure of a man of slight stature, with gray beard and bent shoulders.

He peered curiously into the coach, and his eyes traveled quickly and with apparent indifference over the big frame of Caruthers. Then he stepped in and, with a slight nod to Caruthers, dropped a small handbag on the cushioned seat, pulled his soft wool hat over his eyes, sank down in one corner of the compartment, and thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets.

Caruthers witnessed these movements with some satisfaction, and, after

a glance or two at his companion, and an instant's look outside at the yellow lights which were flying by as the express gathered speed, he spread out his legs, pulled his coat up about his ears, and proceeded to make himself comfortable for the one hundred and twenty mile ride before him.

Five minutes later he was sound asleep, and making that fact unmistakable by the most tremendous snores.

But if Caruthers snored loudly, his brain was fully as active as were his lungs, and, for a time, he passed through a series of adventures in dreamland which were anything but unpleasant.

Then, suddenly, he was transported from a delightful fantasy into what seemed to him to be an immense haberdasher's shop, where he found himself unceremoniously set down before a little old man, who insisted upon fitting around his neck a most prodigiously high and stiff collar.

Now, if there was anything against which Caruthers was for all time and most vehemently opposed, it was high collars, and therefore he struggled hard to push away his tormentor and remove the objectionable neck piece. But all to no purpose.

To his surprise, he found his arms weighted down as if with lead. His persecutor coolly continued to fit on the collar, and finally, having done this to his satisfaction, pushed over his head until the top edge of the collar cut into his neck and was choking him.

Caruthers used every endeavor to raise his arms, but in vain. Great drops of sweat seemed to drain down his face as he tugged at his invisible bonds, and all the time he felt the little old man passing his hands, which were plump and smooth, over his body, thrusting them now into his pockets, now inside his vest, and again pulling at his fingers.

All at once, however, even the desire for resistance left the dreamer, his sensations became dull, and he fell again into unbroken sleep.

His next sensation was when his eyes began to feel the light and he slowly became aware of a dull, dead feeling in his arms, a fulness of the head, and a dry contraction of the throat. After a while he was sensible of the motion of his resting place, and at last his eyes took in enough of what was about him to show him that this was no haberdasher's shop, but the inside of a railway carriage traveling at high speed, that there was no high collar about his neck, and that no little old man stood opposite him.

But it was some time, nevertheless, before his brain became clear enough to appreciate that all he seemed to have gone through with lately was only a dream, and that he now was in the 7.45 express from London, and probably—how many hours on his journey?

He slipped his fingers into his waistcoat pocket for his watch. Then, with an exclamation of surprise, he raised himself quickly to his feet and somewhat weakly stood there, feeling for the handsome hunting case which he could find nowhere.

It took him but a minute to realize this, and also that the gold cuff buttons he had worn and his diamond scarf pin were gone, and that a curious stone studded ring had disappeared from the little finger of his left hand.

They all had gone; but where? A sudden recollection of the old bent man

who had entered the compartment just before their departure and been his silent and apparently indifferent traveling companion, made him peer closely into the corner in which that figure had been curled when he last saw him. But the corner was empty now.

As Caruthers' glance moved quickly over the opposite seat, however, one object caught his eye. He picked it up. It was a handkerchief, innocent of any markings, but smelling very strongly, as he instantly became aware, of chloroform.

The pungent odor told Caruthers all he needed. It was a complete confirmation of the theory which had flashed upon him at the first. He had been robbed, and in all likelihood by the little old man who had been his companion.

Caruthers pressed his face against the window. He was familiar with the country through which the train was passing, and he soon saw where he was. The express was fifty miles out of the metropolis, and by schedule must have made a stop at R——, about ten miles back. It was there, he decided, that the thief had got out.

The next stop would be made some twenty five miles farther on, and he would have to wait until then to communicate the knowledge of his loss. So he arranged himself as comfortably as possible and began to consider how he could most quickly recover the articles which had been taken by the robber he had not thrown out of the window, and whether he could prevent the news of the robbery from spreading, so that he should not receive the taunts of his friend, Toppy Russel, by telegraph or otherwise, upon this doubly trying experience.

As soon as the guard had opened the door of his carriage at the next station, half an hour later, Caruthers jumped down and, dashing into the telegraph office, quickly despatched a statement of the facts to the chief of police at R——. His message offered a generous reward for the apprehension of the rascal and the recovery of the articles of which he had been robbed, with the least possible publicity.

Two hours later, arrived at his destination, he left the train, took a hansom to police headquarters, and notified them that a despatch addressed in his name might be received there from R——. If such a despatch did come, it was to be sent to the B—— hotel, he ordered. Then he was driven to the hotel and having engaged a room, turned in and quickly fell asleep.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when he was awakened by a knock on the door of his room, and a telegram was handed him. It was from the police at R—— and ran as follows:

Have got thief and recovered all articles. Thief disguised. Young man. Think he is old hand at business. Communicate at once.

Caruthers sent the servant double quick for a morning paper, and having satisfied himself that the news of the robbery and of the capture of the thief had at least not gained circulation outside of R——, he dressed himself leisurely.

Then he ate a comfortable breakfast, lit a cigar with the utmost satisfaction, and strolled down to police headquarters.

To his surprise he found another despatch from R—— awaiting him there. He read :

Come and get me out of this. I was the old man who traveled with you and stole your things. I wanted to see you throw me out of the window. I acknowledge the corn. Come quickly. This confounded place is damp, and they won't believe my story.

TOPPY.

In amazement, which rapidly gave way to laughter he could not restrain, Caruthers read the message a second time, and then he telegraphed to the chief of police at R——

Hold thief. Dangerous man. Pay no attention to his story! Be with you to-morrow.
G. CARUTHERS.

It was a wobegone and irate specimen which Caruthers saw when the "dangerous man" was led forth from a cell at the police station at R—— next day.

But Caruthers smothered his laughter at the sight, smoothed Russel's wrath as far as possible by apologies, and having paid the costs and fines which the police demanded that some one should pay, after his explanations, walked out of the station with his friend.

To this day, however, Topsy Russel has serious doubts as to Caruthers' statement that he "believed Russel's telegram a forgery;" and he awaits a chance to turn the tables on the man he "robbed."

A LOVERS' RACE.

OVER the hills and dales she wheels,
Her lover following fast ;
Oh, 'tis a race—
A rare love chase,
And though he's ever at her heels,
She leads him first to last.
Yes, just by half a length she keeps
The lead with calmest ease ;
Ah, don't they go
Like lightning, though !—
Over the plain and sun kissed steeps,
As merrily as you please.
And will he catch her? Faith, I doubt !
They might speed thus all day,
And in the rear
He'd stay, I fear ;
You see, to let the secret out,
A tandem's built that way.

Charles Edward Barns.

IN PERILOUS WAYS.*

BY WILLIAM W. RUSS.

The story of a knight errant's peculiar mission—Exciting experiences of war time in Mexico—
Fighting against heavy odds with friends at times indistinguishable from foes.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

After a few years of roving Maxwell Harvey, who tells the story, finds himself in El Paso, where chance brings him the acquaintance of Philip Melrose, a man from New York City well on in years. Having reason to know Harvey as a fellow possessed of courage and determination, Melrose commissions him in a peculiar service—nothing less than the kidnapping of his niece from her stepfather in the city of Mexico. She is the daughter of Melrose's brother, now dead, who married a Mexican during his consulship; the girl has spent much of her time in the East at school under her uncle's care, and now, knowing that her stepfather is trying to gain possession of her fortune, the old gentleman seeks aid in getting her away entirely from her present environment.

Taking for his companion Theodore Martin, a young doctor out of patients, Harvey sets out for the capital of Mexico, which he reaches after many vicissitudes by the way, for it is a time of civil war. He discovers the house of Don Carlos, where the girl is kept under surveillance, and then, in the hope of learning something useful in regard to it and its master, he makes himself at home in a wine shop near by, seeking to gain a friendly footing with its frequenters by playing cards with a party of them. After playing a short time, he is accused by one of the men of cheating, gets the better of him in a fight, and escapes. Followed, he takes refuge in the house of Don Carlos, where he manages to meet Señora Teresa. While talking they are interrupted, and to escape Harvey jumps from a second story window, landing on a monk.

Again finding himself followed, he hides in a doorway, and by so doing puts his pursuers on another man's track. The latter is soon attacked and Harvey, going to his rescue, finds him to be Francisco Miranda, a person of some note.

Hearing the next morning that there is a warrant for his arrest, Harvey refuses to open his door, emphasizing his statement with a revolver. Later he grants admittance to a man, who claims to bring an important message, whereupon a monk stalks in and stands motionless before him.

CHAPTER IX.—THE PRICE OF LIBERTY.

WAS I in need of spiritual comfort?

I shuddered. The dark robed figure seemed more an apparition from the lower world than the representative of a holy religious order. There was evil in his very countenance. He meant no good for me, and as for trusting him, I could look for nothing but deceit and treachery from him.

"This is Señor Harvey, I believe?" he asked, and a cunning smile crossed his features.

"I think we have met before," I replied, "and need no introduction."

"Yes, we have met before," he repeated, with a curl of his lip, "but under different circumstances."

"From your choice, not mine," I answered.

**This story began in the November issue of THE ARGOSY. The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.*

"No, not from my choice, Señor Harvey," he said slowly, "for I have no choice, but to do the work there is for me to do."

"It is your choice that you elect to be a spy and dog my footsteps, question my servants, and seek to pry into my private business!"

"It is but my duty, or is made my duty, when you set yourself against an authority which is supreme, and gives me no choice but to watch you. I warned you once, but you did not heed my warning. Now you shall fall at my feet and ask my supplication on your behalf."

"Never!" I cried.

"That would be a brave thing for you to say, señor," he replied, with a grim smile, "did you know what you are saying. You are in Mexico, and not in the States. You are young, too, and have the impetuosity of youth, which may excuse you somewhat. But do you not think that it would be an inglorious thing to starve in a dungeon?"

"Your threats are but the artifice of a coward and a sneak!" I replied.

"Careful, señor; I shall remember what you say."

"Well, then, what do you want?" I demanded. "Have your say that I may be rid of you. Your presence is decidedly obnoxious to me."

"Señor will do well to curb his tongue, or I may choose not to talk with him, in which case my going would be a misfortune he will have reason to regret."

"I will hear you," I replied impatiently, "but I warn you to be brief, for if I am much more provoked by your overbearing ways I cannot vouch that I will not lay hands upon you, monk thought you are."

"*Nombre de Dios*, is it not enough that you once fell upon me and nearly killed me?"

"It is probably my misfortune that you were not killed. I suppose that I owe it to you that I have been arrested and am kept here a prisoner."

"I have been instrumental in having you brought to the notice of the commanding officers. When you find out what influence I have, you will respect me more. The church is all powerful, and its priests are the pillars of its strength. Even as lowly a one as I am may come to make terms with presidents."

His self confidence and conceit were very evident.

"Your name is Fray Ignominious?" I asked.

"Even so. The degraded one."

"The shameful, the contemptible, the dishonorable one!" I cried.

"Who, though marked with ignominy, yet shall rise to power," he added, as though not heeding me.

"And why am I indebted to you for this visit?" I asked.

He smiled, and I could see the cunning in his face. He felt that he had me in his power; and, like the low born wretch that he was, was disposed to play with me for a while.

"You are impudent, señor, and I would first humble you. What is one American in the great state of Mexico? What is one insignificant mortal that, if he should never return to his own country, any one would ever inquire as to his fate? And should any one inquire, do you think anything would be

learned? There are dungeons which never give up their secrets; there are those who serve as jailers who never tell what they know. There is no law to punish when there is no one to accuse; and there is no one to accuse when silence alone answers. No, Señor Harvey, you would be lost to the world. Ha, ha, ha! You defy one poor monk, and you defy the Holy Church."

"Wretch," I cried, "do you not know that you are now in my power? What is to hinder my striking you down where you stand. Say, what excuse have you for living?"

"To seek out such heretics as you are and destroy them," he hissed.

"Be about your business, then; I am waiting.

"You speak boldly for one who is a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" I replied. "Do you think I cannot effect my escape?"

"What would your escape profit you? Do you not know that the whole guard of the city would be on your track? Do you think you could find a shelter in a single house—a hiding place in all Mexico where you would not be hunted down like any wild beast? Already everything you have done is known—your interview with Señor Melrose—your quarrel in the *pulqueria*—your visit to Don Carlos' house."

"And supposing this is all known—as you say it is?"

"You spoke of escape; it is to show you that you are watched—that it is impossible for you to escape."

"Then what more would you have?" I asked.

"It is in my power to offer you liberty," he replied. "You have engaged yourself in a business that is no affair of yours, and which, even if successful, can profit you nothing. You did not consider the risk, or count the cost. You can see what you bargained for. You have so far but made enemies, and involved yourself in quarrels—killed one man. The law demands your life.

"Even if you escape the penalty of the law, there are those who are sworn to kill you. To escape one danger is to meet others; to escape one enemy is but to encounter another. Why should you sacrifice yourself? I can give you the opportunity to escape, and offer you a safe conduct out of the country."

He was speaking the truth. It was an impartial statement of the situation I was in. So far I had accomplished nothing, and it was true that the quarrel in which I had involved myself was no affair of mine. Moreover, I had interested myself in the cause of a perfect stranger, and even success might be of a doubtful benefit.

What of Mexican dungeons and assassins' knives? They threatened me! Could I escape them? What of honor, of friends, of home, of country, when my body was moldering in an unknown grave?

It may be that the monk noticed that I wavered.

"What is it you want?" I asked.

"Listen," he whispered, "we want the address of Señor Melrose; where is his hiding place?"

I gave a sudden start. What of the all powerful church, and the astuteness of its agents? What of the monk who knew everything? Philip Melrose had escaped them.

I, too, would escape them. They thought that I knew where he was, and they would bribe me. The price of my liberty was the betrayal of my friend.

But it was not in my power to give the information wanted. I knew not where Philip Melrose was, and honor, at least, was safe.

But what answer was I to make? There might be a chance for me to gain time, and time meant opportunity for furthering a plan of escape. I seized upon the suggestion.

"You will let me think this matter over?" I asked.

"Señor hesitates," replied the monk with a grin.

"I ask for time to make up my mind."

"You may have until this evening—the delay will not matter."

I made no answer, and he backed himself out of my presence.

I was left alone to meditate on this strange interview. I wondered at the fellow's anxiety to discover Mr. Melrose's whereabouts. It did not occur to me at the time that his niece was his only heir, and through her his wealth might go to the church. I fear that I was more shortsighted than the monk I presumed to despise.

Later in the forenoon a servant brought me my breakfast. "So they are not going to starve me out of my fortress," I thought.

I discovered a slip of paper skilfully hidden on the tray. Eagerly I seized it. It was a brief note written with a pencil.

Make your escape—your visit is known—everything known. Fly, fly. Am to be taken to the convent.

TERESA.

Coming from her hand, it was a precious bit of paper. I placed it carefully in an inner pocket. But, alas for sentiment, I afterwards lost it.

I inquired of the servant when he came back for the tray, if any one had called to see me. At first he said there had been no one, but afterwards acknowledged that a lady—whom I satisfied myself was the duenna—had inquired for me.

So Señorita Teresa was to be sent to the convent. I had expected as much. It would be a safe prison. Unless I could rescue her before she went there my mission would likely be at an end; for once within its walls escape would be very difficult.

I left my breakfast untasted. I had no appetite. I paced the room restlessly. I was both indignant at what was to befall her, and furious that I was shut up in my own room. I wondered if Martin would come—he had promised to bring me a passport. It occurred to me that he might be of further assistance to me.

As if thinking of Martin had brought him, I heard his voice outside. He said something to the guard, and they let him pass. In a moment I had my door open, but he closed it quickly behind him as he came in.

"I did not expect this so soon," he said.

"You are the very person I was wishing to see," I exclaimed, seizing his hand.

"Hm! You are in a predicament!" he replied, with a motion of his hand toward the guarded door.

"I am in prison," I exclaimed. "A double guard has been set over me. But by force of sufferance, and fear of an open rupture and active hostilities, I am permitted to remain in my own room. Do you think that I could not escape? But then, the difficulty is, where should I escape to?"

"I appreciate your embarrassment," replied Martin, in the best of good nature. "Your position is unique—without a parallel, as far as I know. I appreciate your embarrassment."

"I want you to depreciate it, and help me get out of here—I mean, help me after I do get out of here. I am getting desperate—I have business to attend to."

"I suppose you have been arrested as a spy, or being an agent of the enemy, just as I warned you that you would be. Did I not have an eye to see what was up?"

"Yes, but you mistake the object of my arrest, and argue a cause from an effect. I am telling you the truth when I say that I have had nothing to do with the accursed politics of the country. I am not in the political business as you suppose I am. It is all on account of a little affair in which a woman figures."

"Oh, a love affair, is it?" he asked, his lip curling. "I thought you were in better business than that. But it was so from the first—a woman. You have aroused the jealousy of the Dons. In this event, I think your release can be arranged for, provided, of course, that you renounce the señorita."

"Stuff and nonsense," I cried.

"Exactly," rejoined Martin composedly.

I was obliged to recount to him all that had occurred from the beginning, explaining my mission, and the service I had undertaken.

As may be imagined, he listened with open eyes. I grew eloquent in describing the señorita's beauty, and the wrongs she had suffered. I pleaded her cause as I would have pleaded it had I been a lawyer before a jury, appealing to his sympathy and sense of justice, and I won—that is, I won Martin's sympathy and his promise to assist me in every way he could.

"You can count on me," he exclaimed, taking my hand. "Ah, it is something worth doing to rescue a señorita from the Dons!"

"I shall need your help," I said. "The chances are against us, but success is not impossible."

"No, not impossible," he replied.

"What I must discover first is where the señorita is to be taken. Then we must try and rescue her before she goes there. God save her if the doors of the convent close on her, for I cannot."

"I will endeavor to get this information for you," he volunteered, "but I would suggest that if I had a little money to use, it might not come amiss."

"You shall have it," I said. "Money tells." Without stopping to count the sum, I transferred to him nearly all I had—a pretty good amount altogether.

"I suppose we can depend upon Pedro to assist us."

"Yes, you talk with him, and explain things." I had almost forgotten the peon who had proved so faithful to us on our journey.

"But what are your plans, if I may ask?" he inquired.

"I shall escape from here," I replied confidently.

It had occurred to me that I might overpower the monk when he came in the evening, and escape under cover of his gown.

"You speak as if certain of success," said Martin, with a smile.

"Why, do you think they could keep me here? They are afraid of me. Why did they not take me when they came for me this morning, and not leave me holding the fort?"

"And when you get away from here?"

"Have two good men besides yourself—Pedro will do for one—and contrive to let me know where I am to meet you. We have got to make a bold strike. See that Pedro has my horse saddled, so that I can mount instantly. Once I am off, they won't overtake me."

I was carried away with the daring of my own plans. I saw Martin grit his teeth. He was counting the danger. He promised, however, to do all I directed. It did seem like a foolhardy undertaking to attempt escape in the way I had planned, and to endeavor to kidnap the señorita, but I was excited—I was desperate—I had to act.

"And do not forget the passport," I whispered, as he was about to leave.

"I think there will be no difficulty about it—I'll fix it some way," he replied.

He shrugged his shoulders, looked at me half incredulously, seemed about to say something more, then turned and went out of the room, I securing the door after him.

I was in a fever of uneasiness and suspense. The minutes dragged wearily along. The guard was changed after a while, but I was undisturbed.

I examined the windows again, but there was no possibility of escaping by them. I could not go down through the floor, nor up through the ceiling. I listened with my ear close against the wall on my left, and I could hear people talking. I knew that the room on my right was occupied by a gentleman, for I had on several occasions seen him come and go. As I could hear no one there, I concluded that he was away.

It seemed possible for me to make an entrance into this room on my left. With my pocket knife I cut away the plastering over a space of a foot or so square below the level of my bed. After doing this, I dug the mortar out from between the bricks, finding it not a difficult task. I could do it while lying on my bed, and I worked quietly so as not to alarm the guard or arouse suspicion as to what I was up to.

I removed one brick, then found it easy to remove others. Suddenly, while I was at work, there was a noise at my door, and I quickly shoved my bed against the wall, and rolling over on it, feigned sleep. The door was bolted, so that no one could have entered without forcing it.

Whatever the disturbance was, it was only momentary, and I was about to resume my work again when I noticed a slip of paper fluttering on the floor.

I made haste to secure it. It was a piece of note paper, probably torn from a letter, and on one side I made out the words "on the Paseo." It was evidently meant for me, but the information was meager enough.

I sat on the bed and turned the paper over and over, scanning it closely; but there was nothing else written on it.

If I succeeded in escaping, why should I go out on the Paseo? The whole city rode on the Paseo. It was always thronged early in the evening. As well might I be seen on the Plaza Mayor or at the Palacio de Justicia as on the Paseo, for either place would be no less public, and as safe for me.

I concluded that Martin had some reason of his own for naming this spot and resumed my task of removing bricks and mortar. Only a single row of bricks finally remained between me and the room adjoining, but as it was some time before evening, I shoved my bed back against the wall, and waited.

When I deemed the hour favorable for me to attempt to escape, I carefully removed the outer tier of bricks, thus making an opening into the adjoining room. I soon satisfied myself that the apartment was not occupied. Nervously I enlarged the hole sufficiently to admit my body.

One of the bricks I had loosened fell to the floor with a thud. I waited, breathless, but the noise seemed to have attracted no attention, and I worked my way through the opening.

On the table in the room in which I found myself lay a belt with pistols and a knife. On a peg driven in the wall was a suit of clothes. The pistols I threw under the bed, but I took down the clothes and proceeded to exchange my own coat for the one I found.

It was, as I soon discovered, somewhat too small for me, but I could do no better in the way of a disguise. A wide sombrero hung near, and this, too, I appropriated for my own use.

It was now dark enough, I thought, for me to slip out of the room without being recognized. I already had my hand on the door when I heard some one coming.

Stepping back a little I waited for the person, whoever he might be, to pass. But instead of going on, he paused outside the door, addressed a word or two to the guard, and then came into the room.

Fortunately, the place was dark, and not being seen at first, I slipped between him and the door to prevent his giving an alarm. When he did see me, the man started as if he had beheld a specter, and then reached for his pistols, but they were not where he had expected to find them.

For the moment, I think, he lost the power of speech, and it was well for him that he did, for had he cried out I would have dealt him a blow over the head with one of my own heavy pistols.

"Not a word from you," I whispered. "I want nothing but to escape."

"*Madre de Dios!* then why don't you go?" he gasped.

"Quick," I said; "turn around; place your hands behind you!"

He seemed to understand. Probably he saw the opening in the wall. "Go; I will not hinder you," he whispered.

"Silence!" I hissed in his ear.

He evidently thought it best to make no disturbance, and submitted to being bound and gagged.

I was determined, if possible, to put it beyond his power to raise an alarm until I was well away. I had secured him in an almost incredibly short time,

binding him with a strip of blanket, and warning him to keep still, I turned to the door.

I stepped quickly into the gallery. One of the guard turned and spoke to me, but I feigned not to hear him. I gained the court, passed two or three soldiers, and went along to the stable. My horse was waiting. So far I had succeeded beyond expectation.

CHAPTER X.—IN THE SADDLE AGAIN.

It was with a thrill of exultation that I felt my feet touch the stirrups, and gave my horse the rein as he sprang through the stable door. I was free. I breathed the open air again.

I cared not that the guard must soon learn of my escape. What mattered it if they did follow in pursuit of me? So far I had outwitted them, and if they tried to overtake me, I would lead them a pretty chase.

Whether the people whom I passed thought me a madman, or a messenger bearing important despatches, I took no time to consider. They stepped aside to get out of the way; and I stopped for nothing.

On I rode, without drawing rein, through narrow alleys and side streets, avoiding the main thoroughfares as much as possible, my horse seeming to be possessed with the same transport of exhilaration which animated me.

It will be seen that from my lodgings in almost the extreme northern part of the city, I had to go to the suburbs in the southern part, a distance of nearly five miles. I took no account of the streets through which I passed, and I could not have remembered them afterwards if I had tried; but I kept in a general direction toward the Alameda, which was a landmark I could not easily miss. After I left the Alameda I took the Calle de Patoni to what is now the Paseo de la Riforma, and now for the first time let my horse walk.

It was on the Paseo that I expected to meet Martin; but just at what place, or when, I had no way of finding out. It would seem like a mere accident were I to meet him and our plans succeed. A hundred contingencies might arise, any one of which would be sufficient to defeat my object.

Why should the young lady be taken to the convent at this hour? Or, was she going to the convent at all? If she was, how could Martin know what convent she was to enter? These questions, and many others which occurred to me, served to convince me upon what a slender hope I was basing my calculations.

I was very much in the dark as to the whole matter; but as yet, of course, I had not seen Martin. He, no doubt, could explain many things. I rode slowly along the road for some distance looking for him all the while.

Not far in front of me rose the castle of Chapultepec; and on the slope of the hill upon which it stood were the cyprus groves which had stood there for how long no one knew, but for centuries before the conquest.

Everything was very still; and under the high, moss draped arches the road was dark and gloomy. I turned, and, riding back a short distance, took the thoroughfare which led to the convent.

In the quiet of the evening the buildings presented an imposing spectacle. Before me was the lake, its glassy surface reflecting the stars and the columns supporting the promenade above. Terraced stone walks rose from it, bordered by plants and flowers. The air was laden with the perfume of the orange and the lemon; and there were orchards of apple, pear, quince, and olive.

It was a place beautiful in the extreme—a dream of loveliness, but none the less a place which might be made a prison.

Far to the south I could see the shadow of Popocatepetl, and the white robed Ixtaccihuatl; silent watchers who had kept guard through the ages, while many races of men had come and gone. Only for a moment was I overpowered by my thoughts, the stillness of the evening, and the recalling of historical events which made memorable the place.

I rode toward the city. Now and then I passed people on the way, but the Pasco, after dark, is always almost deserted. It seemed unusually quiet to me, for I was laboring under the reaction which follows excitement; and the effect on my spirits was something depressing.

What a forlorn chase I was leading! How improbable was success! It was like a dream—the fair señorita a myth—the events of the last two days but fancies. I was aroused from my lethargy by finding myself again in the city, and seeing three horsemen coming toward me. I turned well to one side to let them pass.

"Is this you, or some one else?" asked one of the men, turning his horse and riding up to me.

In an instant I had recognized Martin's voice, and had called his name with a joyous feeling of surprise.

"By all the saints in the calendar, I'd as soon have thought to see your ghost!" he exclaimed.

"You did not think that I would be able to escape?" I asked.

"I will admit that the chances seemed against you," he replied. "What, did you walk out of your prison unchallenged, or bribe your jailers? Or, did you make a grand sally, and charge the enemy? It would be just like you to do such a thing as that."

"No, I crawled out through a hole in the wall," I answered, "just as any common malefactor would have done. There was nothing at all glorious or noble in my escape. But what have you discovered? I am impatient to know."

"Everything!"

"You don't mean it!" I cried. "And what is everything?"

"Donna Teresa will pass along this very road," he replied, with a dramatic wave of his hand. "An escort of four trusty fellows of the regular guard will accompany her. I assure you your lady travels as becomes her fortune and her position in society."

Martin either soared or was down in the depths.

"How did you gain this information?" I inquired, having some doubt as to the truth of his statement.

"Oh, partly by putting this and that together, and partly by the judicious use of a little money," he replied, with a chuckle.

"And this fellow who is with you, who is he, and where did you get him?" I asked, motioning to one of the men who stood near. The other man I had recognized as Pedro.

"Oh, Jose, you mean! I bought him. In this country men have their price. Money is a moving factor."

"Are you sure that you know what Don Carlos' plan is about sending Señorita Teresa to a convent?" I inquired.

"I am sure that I know what was his plan," he replied. "At least that she was to go this way. You can depend upon it that I have not been idle, and that I played a shrewd game. Now I have discovered for you the information you wanted, may I inquire what you are going to do?"

"I expect to rescue her," I said. "We must take the guard by surprise and overpower it. What do you say?"

"It is not for me to say," he replied, "but you can count on me to stand by you, whatever you do."

He had fallen in with my plans with a readiness that I had not expected. To one not acquainted with frontier life, and unaware of the success with which stage robbers and highwaymen often operate, the plan would have seemed impracticable. In Mexico, especially, highwaymen and bandits were an institution of the country, and they plied their business almost with impunity.

Martin, as I knew, was inclined to be a little reckless, especially as fortune seemed to favor him as it had done of late. I think, to him, the adventure was more in the nature of an escapade than anything else.

As for myself, there seemed to be no alternative now I had got into the business, and I entered upon it with a firm determination to see it through. In truth, it was almost what I had expected—Mr. Melrose had told me that I might have to kidnap the señorita. But the idea of doing this did not at all please me.

Coming to a convenient place for halting, we drew our horses aside under the shelter of the trees. I discussed matters with Martin, and we agreed on a course of action.

I was a little afraid of the man he had hired, but after talking with him I discovered no reason why I should not place reliance upon him. Martin said that he had bought him, and I think he had, for it was evident that he was serving for pay; and the prospect of receiving a nice little sum of money without having to work for it, pleased him. He had been in the army, he told me, and had seen a little of guerrilla warfare, and was not frightened at the prospect of a little brush with the guard.

The peon, Pedro, had become greatly attached to me during the time he had been in my service, and I doubted not would fight to the death if need be. I laid my plans carefully, as a general would have designed some adroit movement. However, the unexpected happened, as it often does, and they were destined to some modification.

While we were talking we discovered a small party of horsemen coming down the road. They appeared to come from the fortress of Chapultepec, and I naturally inferred that they belonged to the garrison there.

We retired further under the shadow of the trees so as not to be seen, and to allow them to pass. To our surprise and embarrassment, they did not go on, but halted nearly opposite to us, as if waiting for some one.

I was greatly disconcerted by their presence, for it was inauspicious, to say the least. We waited, but they did not move on. I began to fear that we had fallen into a trap, and questioned Martin as to what it meant; but he was at as much of a loss to give an explanation of their presence as I was myself.

We could not be seen on account of the deep shadows of the trees, though we could see them as they stood in the open road. But I was constantly apprehensive that we would be discovered from the movements of our horses, or from their whinnying to the other animals. At last, when I had almost determined on a flank movement to attempt to reach the road ahead of them, they moved away. We followed them cautiously, but only to see them halt again a little distance off, and then separate, three going to the right and three to the left side of the road.

"This is an ambuscade, and we will do well to keep out of it," suggested Martin.

I was of the same opinion, but whether it was to effect our capture, or waylay some other party, I had no way of discovering. They blocked the way completely, preventing me both from passing them or executing a flank movement to get around them.

Martin was in favor of falling back, but I decided that there would be time enough to retreat when we were compelled to do so.

While we were yet undecided what to do, my ear caught the sound of a carriage coming up the road, and by moving a little into the open I could see that there were outriders also. The carriage was one of those heavy closed affairs such as were used by the wealthier class of Mexicans.

As it came opposite the place where the men had disappeared from sight we were witnesses of a little drama which was something after the order we might have instituted ourselves had nothing interfered with our plans. A horseman rode into the middle of the road, and others advanced on either side. What was said, we could not hear, but the driver of the carriage drew his horses up suddenly.

Either the guard was taken completely by surprise, or the men were lacking in courage, for they offered no resistance. The whole business of holding up the party was seemingly accomplished so easily that I could have sworn for vexation at not having been in the place of the highwaymen myself.

"That beats me!" exclaimed Martin under his breath.

"Who in the devil are they?" I asked.

"Bandits!" replied Martin, in a tone of disgust.

I had thought as much myself, only that it seemed almost incredible. There was a mystery about the affair which puzzled me. I was certain that they were not ordinary bandits who had held up the carriage for robbery.

As we sat there on our horses, we saw the vehicle turn quickly around toward the city. Whether one of the men was provoked to resistance, or whether it was an accident, will probably never be known; but he drew a pistol and fired at one of the attacking party.

The shot was returned; and this was a signal for a general fusilade, in which both darkness and poor marksmanship added to the confusion and uncertainty of the fight.

Quickly grasping the situation the moment the first shot was fired, I led my men around the belligerent parties to where the carriage had been withdrawn. In an instant I had my revolver at the head of the driver, and had ordered him to move on toward the city.

Too much frightened to offer any resistance, he whipped up his horses, my men rattled along behind, and we went tearing down the road at a furious rate for a mile or two. I heard exclamations and cries of fright from within the carriage, but there was no time for explanations.

It was all so quickly done; and events had taken such an unexpected turn, that our success might be considered almost the result of an accident. What the outcome of the fight had been I could, of course, only surmise.

The firing soon ceased, and I knew that the disappearance of the carriage would be quickly discovered. I thought it not improbable that it would be supposed that the coachman had driven back to the city for the safety of the occupants, so that I ordered that the horses be turned east. Afterwards we took the road which leads to San Antonio, and then slackened up and drove at an easy pace.

The driver, as soon as he had somewhat collected his scattered wits, demurred at serving as coachman for me, but peremptory orders led him to conclude that valor would be sufficiently shown by quietly submitting to circumstances for which he could see no help.

If I had stolen horses and carriage, as well as a lady and her maid—the latter afterwards proving to be the old duenna, who had before so materially assisted me—and forced the coachman to drive for me, I excused myself for so doing under the plea of necessity. My lady certainly could not travel without a conveyance, and there was no opportunity to secure another carriage.

Had I dismissed the driver—I certainly would have liked to dispense with him, had I seen any way in which I could safely have done so—I doubted not but that he would have raised an alarm, a squad of cavalry would be sent after us, and we would be overtaken before we could reach the lines of the Constitutional forces. Yet, to keep him with us involved us in almost as great danger as to let him go; for he might take it upon himself, when the first opportunity offered, to inform against me.

I was still debating in my own mind what to do with him when Martin rode up to my side.

"We are likely to pass an outpost soon, and will be challenged," he whispered in my ear.

"How about your papers?" I inquired.

"They are all right."

"Do you think that we will be detained?"

"No," he replied, with a motion indicating the driver, "but how about him?"

"Suppose we leave him behind," I suggested.

"We will probably have to do that. If we do not he will contrive in some way to have us detained. I was going to offer to take his place. Jose thinks that he knows of a driver at the village whom we can secure."

As we were now some distance out of the city I thought that if we were going to drop the fellow, here was as good a place as any to do so. I ordered him to stop the carriage, and Martin, giving his horse to Pedro to lead, sprang up on the seat beside him.

Evidently the fellow believed that we meant to do him bodily harm; for, the instant Martin placed his hand on the seat, he sprang down on the other side of the carriage and made off through the darkness as fast as his legs could carry him. I had not expected to get rid of him this easy, and let him go. Evidently Martin, too, thought it an easy riddance of him, for he gave a soft whistle of satisfaction as he picked up the reins.

But before the carriage started there was a movement from within, and my name was called.

"Yes," I answered.

The curtain was drawn aside by a small hand, and a face appeared at the window. It was too dark to catch any expression, or even to distinguish who the person was, but I recognized the señorita's voice when she spoke.

"Where am I being taken?" she asked.

"We are on the road to Vera Cruz, or will be before long," I replied.

"Why are you taking me to Vera Cruz?" she demanded.

"Why—we shall be safe there," I stammered.

"I wish to return to the city. Have the carriage driven back," she replied.

"What! Return to the city?" I asked in astonishment.

"Yes, that is what I said."

I was dumb. I knew not what reply to make. What reply I should have made I do not know; but just at that moment Martin gave the horses a cut with the reins, and the carriage started so suddenly that I was left behind it, and the señorita was thrown back into her seat.

I was somewhat indignant at Martin for thus suddenly starting without any notice, and spurred my horse close to the carriage to ask him what he meant by it; but in an instant I saw what was the matter. Coming down the road, a few hundred feet in front of us, was a squad of cavalry.

CHAPTER XI.—THE ROAD TO LA PUEBLA.

It was a critical moment for me, for I knew not what turn affairs were likely to take. It was in the power of the señorita to demand of the troopers that she be permitted to return to the city; and if she did so, back we were likely to go, despite any objections or expostulations I might make. The troopers were probably part of the forces which were holding the roads that led to the city.

As we were approaching each other rapidly, they were almost upon us before Martin could thrust into my hand an official looking envelope, which I knew must contain the passport he had procured.

"I think you will have use for the papers," he explained, as he pulled up his horses. "You had better pass the señorita off as your wife."

I know that I blushed when he said this, for I could feel the blood rush to my face; but it was dark, and I blushed unseen. I put the papers in an inside pocket as the captain of the troopers came up.

"Who are you, and where are you going?" he demanded, in a loud voice.

"You can see for yourself," I replied; "we are travelers, and on our way to Puebla."

"I guess not," he blurted out.

"I beg to differ from you," I replied firmly, not to be cowed by him.

He paid no attention to what I said, but riding up to the side of the carriage, roughly drew the curtain aside. "Who is in here?" he demanded.

Either the señorita was too much frightened to answer, or she did not like his manners, for she made no reply. He was apparently satisfied that the only occupants of the carriage were two ladies, for he again turned to me.

"If you will be a little more civil I will answer all inquiries you may wish to make," I told him.

"I will see for myself when I can, without taking your word," he replied.

"I trust that you will satisfy yourself as to the truth of what I tell you, and, having done so, let us proceed."

"You can depend upon one thing," he said ill naturedly, "and that is, that you will not proceed much further tonight. Ho, there; see that these fellows do not escape you," he called out to his men.

Escape by force or flight would have been quite impossible, even had we contemplated such a course, for we were completely surrounded by horsemen. But the officer was a young man, very pompous, and evidently one who wished to show his authority.

"So you were going to La Puebla?" he inquired. "Do you know that this is not the road to La Puebla?"

I told him that I knew that it was not the road usually taken by travelers, but that we could reach the main road by keeping on to San Antonio, and that we had come that way because we considered it less dangerous than the Vera Cruz road—which was all true enough, so far as it went.

"For further safety we shall detain you until morning," he replied, as if the whole matter was settled. "I have received peremptory orders to let no one pass."

"I shall most certainly protest against such treatment," I replied. "We have no time to waste, and I shall insist upon being permitted to go on. We are pressed for time, and so travel by night. I have a passport; and if you refuse to honor it, I shall see that you are made to account to your superior officer."

I knew that everything depended upon our getting away; for by morning, if not before, couriers would be sent out to have us detained. I felt somewhat uneasy, but tried to put on a bold front.

"I know what my orders are, señor," the captain replied, "but I will look at your papers—where are they?"

I handed them to him; and one of his men lit a candle so they could see to examine them.

I was still ill at ease. I had been conscious that Martin wished to say something to me, but I could not manage to speak to him unobserved.

"It seems, Señor Martin," said the officer, addressing me, "that you are a surgeon, an American, and have been detailed for hospital service. This permit to pass the lines appears to be regular. It bears date of today. It would seem to give you permission to go on. But"—he hesitated—"I see no mention of ladies, however."

I had not been informed that the papers had been made out in Martin's name. Naturally enough the captain thought he was addressing the bearer of the papers. I could not venture explanations, and let it pass.

"You will find that the permit gives me permission to pass the lines, and that should include my family and servants as well," I said, acting partly on the suggestion Martin had given me. "As to these fellows," I continued, indicating Pedro and Jose, "they are in my employ. You must admit that it would be dangerous for me to travel without company."

I saw him looking inquiringly at the saddle horse Pedro was leading. "Our driver deserted us," I explained. "We expect to secure another at the village."

"Had some quarrel, did you?" he asked. "Well, I don't believe you, though it may be so."

I did not reply; and he sat there on his horse for a few moments without speaking; then he drew aside one of his men, with whom he held a brief consultation.

"It seems that you have authority to pass the lines," he said, returning and handing back my papers with an officious air. "As for the ladies accompanying you, I see no reason for detaining them; but it would have been more prudent for them to have remained at the capital."

"I agree with you that it is dangerous traveling," I replied, "but it seemed necessary that they should accompany me."

My papers, so it seemed, thanks to Martin's influence and tact, were all right. There was nothing, as far as I could see, either suspicious or irregular in a physician passing through the lines.

Everybody knew that an expedition was about to start for Vera Cruz, and that other forces would act in conjunction with those sent out from the capital. Moreover, it was not improbable that an American physician should be detailed for hospital service, and transferred from one division to another.

The captain ordered his men to draw aside, and we were permitted to proceed.

"How did you manage to get a passport permitting you to leave?" I inquired of Martin, after we had gone on some distance.

"Well, it wasn't very easy," he explained. "I had to invent an excuse; and then I left three weeks' pay to keep company with my promise to come back. The permit is in my name. I was afraid that you would not understand."

"I understood," I replied, caring little so long as it could be made to

serve our purpose. "We would better be making good time. I am afraid of that fellow we let go."

Martin looked over his shoulder, as if he half expected to see him through the darkness, and then whipped up his horses. We went along at a smart trot until we reached San Antonio, and then Jose went to find a driver, while I took the opportunity to explain matters to my fair captive.

"You will pardon me for forcibly carrying you off," I said. "There was no other way. I assure you that I shall offer you every comfort and protection possible on the journey."

"I asked you to return to the city. Since you disregard my wish, I have nothing further to request of you," she replied rather curtly.

"To return would have been impossible," I explained. "You do not consider the danger that it involves. It will be all my neck is worth—and my men!"

"I am in your power," was her brief reply; showing not the least sign that she appreciated the situation I was in.

"Señor Harvey," broke in the duenna, who had remained silent until now, "that you will go no further, I beg of you. It is all my fault that this trouble has come to my mistress. I trusted you. I might have given you over to the guard when you broke into my room, but I let you see my mistress. I brought you the note—it was wrong of me to have done so. I beg of you to let her return. I promise no harm shall be done you. We will give you money. You shall be well paid."

I listened to her in amazement. Had this woman who had trusted me, now turned against me? The girl who at the risk of her own honor had bravely aided me to escape—she who had looked into my eyes so tenderly, and seemed to trust me as she would have trusted her own brother, now scorned and despised me.

What had I done? Did I deserve this? After all, was she satisfied with her lot, and did she desire no change from it? I could reach no explanation of the mystery.

"I am sorry that I cannot do as you would have me do; but what you ask is impossible," I replied firmly.

"We will ask no favors from Señor Harvey," said the señorita, ignoring me, and speaking to the duenna. "We will wait our opportunity. I am certain we will soon find some way to be relieved of his presence."

"Have I acted ungentlemanly?" I asked.

"You have," she replied.

"I will ask you, Señorita Teresa, to give me some explanation. I do not understand."

"There is nothing to explain."

"Then can I not do something to add to your comfort on the journey? Shall I not see if I can obtain refreshments—a cup of coffee while we wait?"

"No, I ask nothing further than what I have already asked. I do not care for refreshments—at least for such as you would be likely to find at this place."

Again the duenna was about to say something, but the señorita bade her remain silent.

"I shall be only too glad to serve you in any way that circumstances may permit," I said, but she did not appear to hear me, so I turned away.

I had given Pedro my horse to hold; and now walked back and forth along the road.

The night was cool, but I was burning. To receive in the moment of my success, the rebuff that the señorita had given me completely unnerved me. I could not account for her strange conduct.

I could easily have believed that I had made a mistake and carried off the wrong person, so changed was she. All my dreams had faded—my hopes were suddenly dashed to the ground. I felt a reckless, nervous feeling that made me care little what happened now.

There was no romance in the affair I had undertaken. It was a plain matter of business—uncongenial business at that. My mental conflict ended in a grim determination to keep my promise to Philip Melrose, whether his fair niece would accompany me willingly or not.

Jose soon returned, having been successful in finding a driver—one who said he knew the road. I informed the ladies that we were now ready to start, but received no reply from them.

We soon left the village far behind us. The horses kept up a good trot. Martin occasionally ventured a remark, but I was in no mood to talk.

It was somewhere about midnight, or a little before, when we halted at a small hamlet, where there was a wayside house. Martin went in to see if we could be accommodated while we stopped for a short rest, and I stepped to the carriage door to assist the ladies to alight.

"Why should I leave the carriage?" asked the señorita.

"You must be chilly," I said, "for the night is cold. If we can find accommodations here, we will rest for an hour or two before we proceed on our journey."

"We will receive poor entertainment, and the house is cold," she replied.

"But a short rest, and a cup of coffee will do you good," I pleaded.

"I will get out," she replied, after some hesitancy, and disdaining any assistance from me, she sprang to the ground; but either from being numb by the cold, or from having remained so long in one position as to become cramped, she would have fallen had I not caught her. I afterwards assisted the duenna to alight.

The señorita allowed me to take her arm as we went into the house; and as she did so I noticed that she trembled.

The room we entered, the only public room the house afforded, was low posted, meanly furnished, smoky, and dirty, and cold, as the señorita said it would be. There was a table at one end and some chairs.

I noticed two men lying on the floor wrapped in their *serephes*. The man who came to the door and told us to come in offered the ladies chairs. I did not at all like the appearance of things, and directed Pedro to remain with the ladies, while I went to give some directions as to the care of the horses.

I was detained longer than I expected, for I made some inquiries of the stable boy regarding the road, and the probability of it being held by the forces of either party. What I learned was not very reassuring.

Numerous guerrilla parties had infested the country, operating more as outlaws and desperadoes, and for the sake of robbery and plunder than anything else; but it was what I might have expected. A party of traders had been attacked a day or two before, two of their number killed, and the others robbed. I was advised to wait until the army moved, but, of course, I could not do that.

When I returned to the house, a little later, I found that the ruffians who had been lying on the floor had taken advantage of my absence to intimidate the ladies. They were indulging in rough jests and coarse remarks.

The ladies had crouched back in the corner of the room, and Pedro stood near them, his face wearing an expression of mingled anger and fear. He had been provoked to the point of desperation.

"Take me away from here immediately!" demanded the señorita, the moment I entered. "I will not remain in the presence of these men."

I had instantly grasped the situation, and going up to the men, demanded what they meant by their ungentlemanly conduct.

There were three of them, one having come in during my absence, all ugly looking fellows, besides the landlord, who also appeared to be of their class. One of the men growled out that he would say what he pleased.

"No you will not," I replied. "There are ladies here, and you will hold your tongue if you cannot use civil language."

"Leave your mistress at home, if she can't stand a little chaffing," he answered.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before I struck him a blow which sent him reeling over a chair, and staggering back against the wall, where he stood muttering threats against me. The other men had their hands upon their knives; while the landlord seemed undecided which side to take.

"Another word from any of you wretches," I cried, "and I'll hit you so hard you'll be glad to hold your tongues."

They did not reply, and I turned to the señorita.

"I think that these fellows will offer you no more insults," I said. "As soon as the horses have been fed, and you have rested, we will go on."

"Thank you," she answered, as she sat down again; and I thought I saw a look of gratitude in her eyes.

"I must ask you," I said, speaking to the landlord, "that these ladies be subjected to no further annoyance."

"You need have no fears," he replied, ready to apologize, as a cheap way out of the difficulty, "they shall not again be molested. I am sorry they took offense."

He set himself to making coffee, and the men left after a little. When Martin came in I told him what had occurred, and instructed him to watch the fellows if they came around the stable. Fearing that they might do Pedro some injury, should he go outside, I had him remain where he was.

The señorita drank a little coffee when it was brought to her, but refused to partake of anything else. In truth she well might do so, for what was set before us was not very appetizing. We did not continue our journey for nearly two hours, and by this time the horses had rested.

We traveled with slow progress after leaving the wayside house. It was a silent, gloomy drive. No one said anything, or appeared to be in a mood for conversation. We met no one, and when we passed a house it was silent and deserted, save for the barking of a dog.

It was cold, and I missed the buckskin jacket I had worn when on the plains. The sleeves of the coat I had on were much too short for me, and this gave it the appearance of having been outgrown.

At last the day broke, and the sun slowly rose from beyond the distant mountains in all its brightness. We seemed to thaw out, the blood returning to our benumbed limbs. The wonderfully clear, and almost dazzling atmosphere of the high elevation was invigorating.

It was a beautiful, or, more properly speaking, a grand country, which lay before us. High mountains rose on either side, broken by deep valleys. Here and there were houses of stone or adobe, odd and picturesque, having roofs of thatch or red tile, and surrounded by flower gardens and orchards.

The señorita had drawn aside the curtain of the carriage, and appeared to be enjoying the beauty of the morning, and the scenery. Her hair was disarranged somewhat, her eyes had a languid expression, and there was a slight flush upon her cheeks; but she was very beautiful.

She said nothing to me, but now and then exchanged a word with the duenna. The latter in the bright morning light, looked haggard and worn. The journey was a hard one for her; and she was laboring, I knew, under considerable anxiety regarding her mistress' welfare.

An hour or two after sunrise we reached a house of which the driver had told us, where we expected to get breakfast. I had previously decided that we would wait there a couple of hours before continuing our journey.

I think that the warm sun and the invigorating atmosphere of the morning had much to do with reviving the señorita's spirits, but still she complained of being tired when I helped her from the carriage. The house was fairly comfortable, and after ordering breakfast I secured a room for the señorita, where she and the duenna could rest for a while. She thanked me quietly for my solicitude.

Two hours later the horses were again in the harness, and we were ready to proceed. The señorita had not come from her room, so I knocked gently on the door, telling her that we were ready to start, and were waiting for her.

She came out, presently, somewhat refreshed from her short rest, her hair combed back from her face, and her dress neatly arranged.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"We will proceed first to Puebla."

✓ I fancied that she brightened up somewhat when I said this.

"When will we reach the city?" she inquired.

I told her that we expected to reach there that evening, but that probably it would be quite late when we arrived.

It was some satisfaction to me that the señorita had deigned to speak to me. Still, she maintained a certain cold reserve and distance for which I could not account; and it puzzled me a good deal. She was not inclined to have any further conversation with me, so I said nothing more.

I fell back behind the carriage and rode by myself; but I noticed that she talked with Martin occasionally, and appeared quite cheerful. Her indifference and coolness might have been from fright, and from the unexpected way in which she had been carried off. This was the explanation I tried to put upon it.

I thought the matter over, but could see no way of making further explanations than I had already made, nor did I think I owed her an apology for anything I had done. Still, I wished that I might establish myself in her confidence.

But it was my first concern to endeavor to successfully place her under her uncle's charge. I still adhered to my determination to make it strictly a matter of business, using my own judgment how best to accomplish that which I had set out to do.

The señorita was entitled to every respect and courtesy I could show her. In a way I was her servant, and I resolved to bear in mind this relation in which I stood to her. I had no right to let personal feelings or considerations influence me in the least.

Barring any obstructions thrown across the road to prevent travel, or meeting with any accident, the rest of the journey was likely to be pleasantly performed. But I was in no little perplexity as to what I should do when I reached Puebla.

We would be obliged to stay there for the night, at least, and we might be prevented from proceeding farther. La Puebla, I knew, was held by the Conservatives. There was every reason why we should not remain there any longer than possible, but should push on until we crossed the lines. If we delayed we might be prevented from reaching Vera Cruz at all, for the second expedition against the city had already started from the capital.

The lines of the siege would be drawn, batteries planted, communication cut off. Then no one could predict what the fortunes of war would be. At Vera Cruz was the American consul, and the American ships in the harbor. We would be near our friends, and we would have all the protection they could offer.

I believed, too, that Mr. Melrose, if he had not already done so, would find a way to reach the coast; for it had been our understanding when we talked together, that this would be our only place of safety.

Along in the afternoon we were startled by a boy coming toward us, apparently greatly frightened, crying out "*Banditti, banditti!*" This was not so much a surprise to us as it would have been had we not almost expected to meet them, knowing that they were far too common in the neighborhood.

Without counting the driver we were four good men, and if not taken at a disadvantage, could make a good fight. I directed Martin and Pedro to remain with the carriage, while Jose and myself rode ahead. I also saw to it that they all had their pistols loose in the holsters.

The bandits, however, proved but a party of cavalry, some eighteen or twenty men. They were mounted on tough, hardy ponies, and were well armed. Their uniforms were almost new, and under their wide sombreros their swarthy faces, their black hair, stubby mustaches and piercing eyes,

gave them almost a fierce expression. They were fine appearing fellows, however; sat in their saddles well, and rode with an easy grace.

We were stopped and asked where we were going, and I was again obliged to show my passport.

"You are an American?" asked the officer.

"I am," I replied.

"Who is in the carriage?"

I hesitated, but it mattered not, for he had turned to the vehicle.

"Pardon me, señora," he said, "for this inquisitiveness. We have orders to stay every one who passes along the road and examine them."

"I, too, am an American," replied the señorita quietly, drawing her mantilla aside.

My heart gave a great bound. She had said this for me. And she was an American!

I had not realized this so fully before. It had been in her power, too, to have put into execution her threat to relieve herself of my presence, and she had not done so.

"You have come a dangerous road," replied the officer, "and are fortunate in not having had a little experience of what guerrilla warfare is like. We hung four fellows below. To have shot them would have been better than they deserved."

He lifted his hat to the ladies, and then let us go on.

I was a little nervous, for I knew that we were not out of danger; and my nervousness was not relieved, when, after passing on a few hundred yards, I saw, on looking back, that two of the troopers were following us.

A little distance ahead we beheld the bodies of the guerrillas the officer had spoken about, hanging from a frame by the roadside.

They were hideous looking objects, their clothes ragged and dirty, their faces black and distorted. I saw the señorita draw the curtain of the carriage. I myself was not disposed to look at them; and a momentary shudder passed over me as I thought that had it been discovered who I was, a like fate might have befallen me.

CHAPTER XII.—IN CHAINS TO CHAPULTEPEC.

It was late that night when we reached La Puebla. We entered the city by the Gate of Mexico. Men and horses alike were jaded and tired, for we had been a day and a night on the way, traveling a distance of something over eighty miles.

Thankful I was that we had escaped the dangers of the road; yet, I could not feel that we were safe from pursuit. However, it was necessary that we rest, and there was no other alternative than to spend the night in the city.

I had heard so much of the strength of the ecclesiastical party at La Puebla, and its aggressiveness in the recent rebellion, that I believed our appearance would be looked upon with suspicion. As it was, we were scanned closely by the guard, and our papers examined, but we were finally allowed to proceed to the hotel where I proposed that we should stay for the night.

The fact that we had come from the capital served somewhat to allay suspicion.

We had some difficulty in securing accommodations at the hotel, as the city was crowded, many having come in from the surrounding country for safety, and the expedition to Vera Cruz had helped to fill the city. The landlord promised to do the best he could for us; and I returned to the carriage to assist the señorita to alight.

"We will stay here for the night, and go on early in the morning," I informed her.

"Where will we go?" she asked.

"To Vera Cruz."

"Is my uncle at Vera Cruz?"

"I do not know," I said. "It may be that he is; in fact, I believe he is there, but I cannot say for certain."

She looked at me questioningly, as if to ascertain whether to believe me or not.

"I understood that you were going to take me to my uncle. You have brought me all this way, and now you say you do not know where he is."

"I shall find him," I replied.

"Where will you find him?" she demanded.

"I cannot answer you that question," I said. "You know that it was extremely dangerous for him to visit Mexico. But, notwithstanding the danger, he did visit Mexico, and three days ago was at the capital under an assumed name. In some way, although he attempted to conceal his identity, his presence there became known. Doubtless he discovered that he was being watched, for he suddenly disappeared. Whether he fled, or whether he is still in concealment in the capital, I do not know. But as to his disappearance, there can be no question, for even his enemies could not find him."

She stood staring into my face, her hands clasped tightly together, and I could see that she was very much agitated.

"My poor uncle!" she moaned; "I should like to have seen him very much."

"I am confident that you will see him," I replied. "He is a man of resources, and shrewd. The fact that he has disappeared leads me to believe that he is safe."

"You do not think he has been killed?"

"I firmly believe that he is alive and well," I answered.

"May God protect him," she cried. She was holding on to the carriage as if for support. "And you will find him, Mr. Harvey?" she asked. "You will take me to him?"

"I will do everything I can," I replied.

She was looking into my face pleadingly. I almost felt that she trusted me. She was so much like a child in some things, that I could believe that she trusted me; yet she was a woman in every sense of the word, and she had lived in Mexico, where people are not trusted.

I had thought that the first passion of love had passed away, and that now it was only a matter of business with me to place her safely in her uncle's

care; but I found myself ready to go down on my knees before her. I was in love—madly—passionately.

"We had better go into the hotel," she said, possibly discerning something of my mind.

"Señorita Teresa," I said, "first let me thank you for the service you rendered me this afternoon."

"I do not understand," she said.

"What you said to the captain of that company of cavalry," I explained.

"Oh, it would have been but an exchange of one master for another. I did not know the captain, and I did know that you were not wholly bad," she replied with a little laugh.

"Thank you," I said, bowing. "I think that you will not find me bad at heart."

"Quite likely, señor," she replied, "but your manners!"

What did she mean by my manners, I wondered? Had I really been guilty of any breach of decorum? I stood there stupidly in the street while a servant showed her and the duenna to their room.

I was forced to admit that the señorita was hard to understand. I turned away from the carriage sick at heart. Something seemed to tell me that I had made a fool of myself at just the time when I should have appeared at my best.

While we were at supper I had a talk with Martin. The señorita and the duenna had lunch served in their room, and I did not see them again. Martin agreed with me that it would be well for us to be on the road early in the morning. He had noticed the two troopers who had followed us, and argued that it boded no good for us.

"There is something questionable in the very fact of our traveling at this time," he said. "We shall be watched, and our men questioned. I believe that captain we met thought us to be political refugees—though he was very polite. Of course, if it is suspected that we intend to go over to the other side, the game is up, and we might as well throw up our hands and be done with it."

"Not until we are forced to do so," I replied. "I do not intend to be bluffed down, or scared into giving the business up. We have a passport, and I'll swear by that. We will get out of here early in the morning before those lazy Mexicans have their eyes open. I will tell Pedro to see that the horses are ready by sunrise."

"Better then than an hour later," said Martin as he sauntered off by himself for a smoke, leaving me to make arrangements about the carriage, and to send word to the ladies.

It was late when I went to my room. I was tired and worn out both from the exertions of the last three days, and from loss of sleep. The night was cool, and I slept soundly.

It was after sunrise when I awoke. I was a good deal annoyed at having overslept myself, and dressed hastily, determined to lose no more time than was absolutely necessary. Martin met me as I came out of my room.

"They have gone," he whispered hoarsely, and I saw that he was very much excited.

"Who have gone?" I demanded.

"The señorita and the duenna. They left a few minutes ago."

"Left for where? What has happened?" I asked, with a sickening consciousness that they had been spirited away.

"A gentleman—a Spanish gentleman came," he explained. "The señorita seemed to know him. She did not at first want to go, but the duenna prevailed upon her to accompany him, and they left. I do not know where they have gone."

"Why did you not find out?" I asked.

"I did not think she would go, and then I had no opportunity for speaking with her," he replied.

"Stupid of you!" I exclaimed. "You say that he was a Spanish gentleman?"

"Yes, but I did not know him. He appeared to be an acquaintance."

"Great God!" I exclaimed, the perspiration breaking out all over my face; "I am undone. We must try and follow them! What direction did they take? Surely you had sense enough to notice that!"

Without waiting for a reply, I turned to go into my room for my arms, but was confronted by an officer and two soldiers. Back of them, smiling grimly, stood the monk, Fray Ignominious.

"He is the man," said the monk, pointing to me.

The fellow had followed me to Puebla to procure my arrest. I wondered how it was that he got there so soon. He it was who was my evil genius, who was ever appearing before me like an apparition.

I started forward to clutch at him, but the soldiers seized me, and held me back. Could I have laid hands upon him, I doubt not I would have choked the life out of him; for never before had I felt murder in my heart as I did then.

He cowered back, scowling at me, the devil in his face excited by a triumphant malice. As the officer stepped forward to take me in charge, a sinister smile parted his lips.

He knew I was in his power—I was not to escape so easily 'his time. I could read him like a book—a sneak and a crafty schemer, unscrupulous as to the means he employed to gain his end. But he held his tongue, waiting for me to speak.

"So this is your doing," I cried. "I could strangle you, you cursed piece of humanity, for your villainy."

I was in a rage. I hardly knew what I said. I felt my breath come quick, and my heart beat hard.

"Señor Max Harvey," he said, with a sour smile, "I came for my answer."

"What answer have I to make to you, you wretch?" I exclaimed.

Freeing myself from the soldiers, I grasped him roughly by the shoulder, but the officer interfered, having reason to fear I would do him harm.

"Stay your hand, señor," he said. "Remember, he is a priest of the holy Catholic church."

"Let him take protection behind his robes," I cried, "but he serves the devil—not God."

"You are a blasphemer, a heretic," he retorted. "You have no respect for things sacred."

"Respect I have for the church, and for those who are honest in their belief," I replied, "but there is always some scullion like yourself, a low born wretch, who defiles the church by his very pretensions of sanctity, who deserves no respect."

"You make brave speeches, señor," he answered, "but a word from me and you are here under arrest. Do you doubt my power?"

I made no reply, but turned to the officer.

"What does this mean?" I demanded.

"I have orders for your arrest, Señor Harvey," he said.

"On what charge—where is your authority?" I asked, yet knowing well that he needed to show me no authority for what he did.

For an answer he only shrugged his shoulders, while a broad grin crossed his features. His men stepped forward, and he motioned them to take me in charge. I was the man he wanted, and he did not see fit to grant me any explanation as to why I had been arrested, or what was to be done with me.

"You will at least let me have a word with my man?" I asked.

He was not inclined to permit me this favor, and the monk put in, advising him that I was a dangerous fellow and would escape if granted the least liberty. But I slipped a coin into the officer's hand, and he consented that we might speak together, but under guard of his men.

I managed to return the passport to Martin, implored him to do what he could to rescue the señorita, and if possible, get me out of the monk's clutches. Pedro came along while we were talking; and when he learned that I had been arrested, asked to accompany me, but I directed him to stay with Martin. He could do no good by following me to prison.

"You will not have an opportunity to escape this time," hissed the monk in my ear, as I was led away.

I saw that he took no little satisfaction in following on behind, chuckling and rubbing his bony hands together. I could hear him as I was hurried along by the soldiers; and sometimes he would come close up to me and jeer at me.

Near the plaza was a squad of cavalry; my own horse was given to me and I was placed between two of the troopers. We set off at once, leaving the city by the same gate by which I had entered the evening before.

I looked back, half expecting to see the monk, but Fray Ignominious had disappeared. I thought that if I had only killed him when I fell upon him as he was listening under the window that day, I should have been well rid of him, and would likely have escaped much trouble.

Mentally I swore every time I thought of him. But now, what could I do? I could carry my pent up wrath, but that was all the good it would do. I might plot revenge, but I had enough to think of to devise a way of saving my own neck, and would be fortunate, indeed, if I succeeded in doing that.

I soon discovered that I was to be taken back to the city. It proved to be a weary journey over the same road I had but so recently traveled.

I was closely guarded day and night. Evidently my captors considered me too valuable a bird to lose, so they saw that my wings were clipped. I was put in chains at night, and during the day I was always surrounded by troops.

There was not even a skirmish—an attack by guerrillas; no obstruction to our progress, no enemy to confront us. It was a long, tiresome ride, without incident or interest—not the smallest chance offered itself for a break for liberty.

At last we had crossed the Cordilleras, and I could look down upon the valley and the capital before me. We had been on the road three days; and each day had brought me nearer to my fate.

It was a fair country that was now before us, picturesque and beautiful, but I saw not its beauty. For me it was full of sinister forebodings. We were nearing the fortress of Chapultepec, and from what I had heard, I had reason to believe that this was to be my prison.

I was correct in my surmises. We did not pass directly through the city, but kept to the left, letting our horses take their own time up the steep ascent of the hill. The gates opened, then closed after me.

I confess that hope itself almost died within my breast when I entered the door of the castle. Prisoners before me, I knew, had entered never to see the light of day again, or to be heard of afterwards. Others had remained there only until they could be taken out and shot. My crime was sufficient to merit the death penalty.

What then, when I was dead, of my fair señorita? What of my courage and daring? I, an adventurer, what clemency had I to expect—what sentence but that of death? A few hours more and the end would come.

Military tribunals did not waste much time trying such criminals as I was—at least, they did not in Mexico. Already I was lost to the world. Like many a poor wretch before me, who had met death from having been on the wrong side, I was likely to be as little remembered afterwards as they had been.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A MOUNTAIN MAID.

BY DAVID LOWRY.

The smallest circumstantial evidence sometimes goes a long way—Being the tale of a Southern girl who was led to believe that her father and lover were deep dyed villains—and what came of it.

DADE'S seemed duller than usual that morning. Tom Dade had scarcely sufficient energy to remove the fly that persisted in alighting upon his bald head.

He met the emergency in a characteristic way by asking Rus Baxter to hand him his straw hat, which had dropped on the ground. Rus gave it a kick; Tom stooped with an effort and put it on.

Hep Stottler was sitting on the ground beside Baxter with his eyes half closed. Both had their hands clasped in front of their knees. It was quite an effort on Baxter's part. The kick he gave Dade's hat was accompanied by a sullen look.

Pete Jeffer's position indicated still greater lassitude. He was lying on the broad of his back, with his torn hat over his eyes.

The mountain peak above Dade's cabin was bathed in sunlight. The radiance of the midday sun fell upon slope and summit, ridges and crags; immense boulders barren of verdure glowed in the sunlight. Far below, the Tennessee Valley stretched away in the distance.

The solitude of the forest was broken by a faint sound, which rolled up the mountain side. As it fell upon Tom Dade's ears, he rose from the box that served the purpose of a seat, and cast a backward look at the mountain peak above him. Then he shook his head gravely.

"'Twon't be much, I reckon. Onnecessary to traip 'roun' jes' to shet the door. Whut's more, I won't. Time enough when I've no ch'ice." Having said this much with an effort, Dade reseated himself, placed his palms flat on his thighs, and drew a long breath.

"I p'intedly believe it's goin' ter rain." It was Rus Baxter who ventured this opinion in defiance of Dade. Possibly he chose to be contrary because Dade had compelled him to kick him his hat.

As the dispenser of powder and shot, to say nothing of the power Tom Dade exercised as constable on rare occasions, Tom found it necessary at times to exact deference from Baxter. Baxter added, "The biggest rain I ever was in kem 'roun' the cove. I was sech a' ijit I thought, jes' like you, 'twouldn't be nothin' pertick'ler; 'n' 'twas the wust rain I ever seed."

As if to give force to this observation, drawled out at intervals to give it due weight, a sharp peal of thunder startled the loungers in front of Dade's cabin.

The sound was as distinct and unexpected as the first premonitions of storms usually prove on the mountain heights. Rus Baxter stood up, then walked around the cabin and looked up the cove.

Three miles beyond Dade's a mist veiled the lower part of the valley. It enveloped the base of the mountains, while near the crest next that on which Dade's cabin stood long, white, thin clouds floated.

They looked like puffs of smoke one minute; the next they assumed the shape of crests; then they dissolved and faded away as the low rumble of thunder reached the ears of the group in front of the cabin.

Another sound was heard now—the sound of horse's hoofs on the mountain road. The metallic ring was unmistakable.

"I'll bet my buttons thet's Jim Bailey," said Baxter, as he returned to the front of the store.

"What 't 'tis?" said Dade.

"Nuthin'. I'll bet he's about ther railroad thet's comin' up ther cove. I'll jes' bet——"

"You'll bet shucks!" said Dade, scornfully; "'z ef Jim Bailey cud tell enny more'n enny other man! I ha'n't missed er minit's sleep on 'count ther railroad, Rus; a'n't like you. You've sot yourself on thet railroad.

"I say whut's more; the man a'n't born thet'll see a railroad runnin' up ther cove. Sech blame nonsense! Whut do we want with er railroad? Who's ter make it go? 'Tain't like 'z ef ther was folks to ride on it like ye see down to Chat'nooga. Whut's ter bring—'n ter carry, eh?—ter take out er the mountains?"

"Wonder 'f Jim's all right with old man Kelsey?"

This remark, deemed rather irrelevant by his fellows, was made by Hep Stottler in the interest of harmony. Like many another would be peacemaker, Stottler simply provided fresh fuel for Dade's wrath, and another subject for Dade and Baxter to "split" on.

"Shows you don't know 'z much as my dog hyur, 'n' he's been blin' 'n' deaf two years." Dade shot a reproving glance at his victim. "Why, Kelsey's ez good ez shet the door in Jim Bailey's face 'f whut folks sez is true."

"Folks sez a heap," muttered Baxter. "I know Jim Bailey. He don't mind the old man no more's I keer fer last year's snow."

"Humph!" said Dade. "Ther man thet gits Sue Kelsey's got ter be smarter 'n enny one 'roun' jes' this minit. Got ter hev pluck, 'n' able to take good keer o' what he gits, better'n most folks. Thet's jes' as true ez gospel, you'll find. Now tell me whur Jim Bailey's goin' ter git enough to sot up ter satisfy old Kelsey? He's ez pore ez——"

"But he's smart," Baxter insisted stubbornly. "Allfired smart. Kin write 'n' figger 'n' jes' holds his own 'ith them fellows thet come crost the kentry talkin' railroad."

"There! Jes' what I've said—talkin' railroad. It'll end in talk."

"And Sue Kelsey—she learned to read 'n' write thet time she went to her aunt's nigh Chat'nooga. You mind me—Bailey 'n' Sue Kelsey——"

The sound of the horse's hoofs came nearer, and a horseman reined up suddenly in front of the cabin. The horse snorted and neighed as the rider dismounted. The loungers sat bolt upright, looking at the newcomer, who stood at the cabin door switching his leg with a slender branch plucked from a tree. Tom Dade rose very deliberately, entered the store, and presently reappeared with a tin cup, which he handed to the newcomer, saying:

"'F you want ennything else, holp yerself—holp yerself, Jim. The gourd's hangin' on the back door."

Jim swallowed the contents of the cup in silence, disappeared in turn, and when he reappeared handed Dade a coin. Simultaneously a girl stepped in front of the cabin. All the men nodded, looking at each other covertly, and Baxter and Stottler nudged each other.

The girl was dressed in a faded figured calico. In lieu of a bonnet she wore a man's straw hat. Her hair hung free half way to her waist—beautiful brown hair it was, with sweeping curls. Her cheeks were brown also. Rounded firmly, glowing with health, they held the eyes of the loungers, all of whom had heard much of, but rarely met, Sue Kelsey.

Her teeth gleamed an instant when she encountered Jim Bailey's eyes. Jim was painfully conscious as he felt the eyes of the loungers glancing from Sue's face to his own, which was now pale. They were flushed with exertion when he dismounted.

"You're not a speck too soon to miss the rain, Miss Kelsey. It won't last long—there's too much of a blow. I notice when rain comes down the cove raisin' a cloud like thet back ther, we don't git mor'n a dash up hyur."

The dash came at this instant. A crash—a lurid glare—and Jim was at his horse's head. As the thunder reverberated along the mountain slope

Jim succeeded in quieting the animal; then he fastened him to a stump at the side of the cabin and sought shelter from the downpour. He was drenched to the skin.

"Thet was about the suddenist I've enny recollection of," said Dade as he waited upon Miss Kelsey, who spoke in a low tone. Jim Bailey heard her ordering some powder and tea. Another package that contained some thread and hooks and eyes and some buttons completed her purchases.

The rain swept fiercely against the single window in one side of the cabin, and the interior grew so dark that the inmates could barely distinguish each other. Tom Dade promptly closed the door.

There was one terrific thunder bolt, then the rain suddenly ceased and in less than ten minutes it was all over. Jim Bailey stepped out and mounted his horse. As the company looked on, Rus Baxter said suddenly:

"Whut's the news? Fetched enny word 'bout ther railroad comin' to ther cove?"

"Yes—tell him," said Dade from the doorway. "Rus's feerful—so feerful that ther railroad'll be built up some night 'fore we're reddy for't thet he can't shet his mind of it. I say it's a passel o' nonsense—blame fool talk. Hit's lucky for me I a'n't 'ithout experience.

"Hyur's ther same fool talk I heard down ter Chat'nooga twenty years ago 'n' more. Hit's my p'inted opinion 'f Baxter waits till ther railroad helps him sell them rocks o' his'n, the world 'll be plumb finished. Whut's your think, Jim?"

"Ef Jim knows," interposed Stottler, "he a'n't sech a' ijit ez ter tell."

Bailey was leaning over his horse's head; he glanced sidewise at Stottler. Dade laughed.

"Thet's the fust sensible word I ever heard from you, Stöttler."

"Tell us," said Baxter. "Give us yer guess. Yer jes' ez likely ter be right ter worst ez Tom Dade. He sez I'm a ijit. I a'n't so old, but I learnt whut some ha'n't learnt yit."

There was a ripple of laughter in which Jim Bailey heartily joined. He was firm in his saddle now, and rode up the mountain road without vouchsafing a reply to either Dade or Baxter, who called after him:

"Much obleeged, Jim. It's blamed foolish ter talk."

"A feller mought not allus jes' be right the fust guess."

Miss Kelsey tripped lightly out of the cabin and stood looking down the slope a minute; then she, too, walked away. The loungers resumed the positions they occupied before the storm passed over the mountain, and the remainder of the day promised unbroken tranquillity for them.

Meantime Miss Kelsey walked rapidly along the mountain side. The storm had brightened the face of nature for her. The mist floating over the Tennessee River grew thinner and thinner until it melted away under the sun's warm rays.

The glow of golden radiance was renewed once more on the mountain slopes. There were diamond-like flashes on petals and leaves where the sun's rays played merrily. Great drops of rain on the gray rocks and in the grass looked like lobes of white fire.

"Whut's yer hurry?" Jim Bailey stepped out suddenly from behind a great rock. His horse was cropping the grass at its base.

"I a'n't in a hurry," said Sue. She stopped and looked in his eyes fearlessly, steadily. "I didn't expect to see you—so soon."

"I couldn't talk afore them." Jim's manner was nervous. He pulled twigs toward him, broke them from the parent stems, and cleared his throat.

"Say, Sue. 'F I kin straighten things up 'ith your folks, it's all right 'tween us two, a'n't it?"

Miss Kelsey's eyes sought the ground. Her lover watched her keenly. His face grew red and pale by turns before she answered slowly:

"Jim, I can't think whut's in your mind. I'm reddy when the time comes—if it ever does. But—now you jes' hear me out. Ther's things I don't jes' understand. Dad's cur'us, you know; sot in his ways. Mam, she's in favor; she's ez good ez told me, Jim. It's dad."

"Thet's jes' it! I've follered thish yer up further 'n a man oughter less'n the gal hez made up her min' to split 'ith the old folks—I p'intedly hev, Sue."

"'Tain't thet, Jim. I said I was reddy—but ther's somethin' 'at a'n't jes' to my mind. I'm afraid of dad, Jim."

"I a'n't, then. When we're by ourselves he'll be jes ez proud on ye——"

"You don't understand, Jim. It's somethin' else. Ef you'n me jine, you'll be in it, too—thet'll make it wuss."

"Nuthin' can be wuss 'n 'tis. Whut's the use puttin' it off?"

"You must give me more time, Jim, and then mebbe ther'll be nuthin' ter be 'fraid of."

"Sue, I a'n't goin' ter keep yer mor'n a minit. I reckon I know whut it is; 'f things turn out ez I expect, we don't need ter wait. I 'low I'm reddy now——"

"You war'n't the last time we talked, Jim."

"I wusn't, nuther. You was in a hurry to say somethin' ter yer cousin, Sam Baird, 'n' I hadn't time. But, Sue, I don't want ter be forever pokin' round—they all know jes' how 'tis 'ith me." He ventured to take her hand. "I tell you, Sue, 'f you'll say the word, I can get reddy in fower minits—in fower minits, mind, Sue, enny time after ter day. I'll tell yer ther story—the whole story—soon. I've been lookin' ahead fur this. Luck's come ter me all ter wunst—but you a'n't sayin' a word, Sue!"

Sue's cheeks and eyes would have answered him had he looked at her, but he was looking down the road. His eyes scanned it keenly. Suddenly he stooped, caught her face between his palms, and, kissing her, said:

"I've got ter light out—it's all right, Sue. Expect me ter see you soon."

The crashing of the branches under the horse's hoofs was all Sue Kelsey heard, as her lover rode hastily away on a dangerous bridle path solely to avoid meeting the man he espied coming up the mountain road. Something—she never could explain to herself what it was—impelled Sue to conceal herself behind the rock. The traveler proved to be her father.

She was tempted to cry out to him. She had a small stone in her hand to toss at him playfully, but again something caused her to reconsider. By that time her father was well up the road.

Instead of turning off on the path that led to his house, however, John Kelsey disappeared in the forest. Shortly afterward Sue saw him standing upon an immense boulder holding something before him. She did not divine the truth; minutes elapsed before she realized that the thing her father had in his hand was a small telescope.

As John Kelsey swept the valley with the glass his daughter trembled like one smitten with the ague. Often in the dead of night she had heard her mother's voice raised in protest, mildly but firmly. Her father's silence was inexplicable.

His sudden journeys, his absence at night, and midday slumbers, the leanness of the larder one day and the superabundance of the next—these were the things that weighed heavily upon Sue Kelsey. When she plied her mother with questions, her silence was worse than her father's curt and angry responses.

She had heard and read of counterfeiters. Was it possible that her father—a man who boasted that he had never asked a favor from friend or foe—was entangled with a gang of counterfeiters?

As Sue Kelsey suddenly realized that the vague fears that prevented her from uniting her fate with that of Jim Bailey were resolving themselves into a certainty worse than she had dreamed of, she sat down suddenly and yielded to a burst of tears.

It seemed to be something shameful—else, why should her father adopt such extraordinary precautions? She was stunned and bewildered by the revelation.

It was well that she had refused to listen to her lover's pleadings. Rather than give any one cause to say that she brought shame to another, she would never marry. Marry! She laughed aloud. It was all over now between her and Jim Bailey. God only knew how she might be taxed in sustaining and cheering her mother when the worst came, or how soon that worst might be with them.

She rose wearily. All the brightness of the day had vanished. There was neither light nor life around her. Could death be worse than this numbness that chained her faculties? She glanced once more in the direction where she had beheld her father. He had disappeared.

Sue Kelsey stood there behind the great rock thinking—recalling trifles that now seemed pregnant with meaning. This, then, explained her father's peculiar relations with Tom Dade, the store keeper. It was all clear now. It was not much wonder her mother pleaded with her father to "run no risks," and yet her father's mocking laughter—the only response he ever vouchsafed—rang in her ears now.

She was stepping out from the rock when her glance fell upon a fragment of paper. She stooped and picked it up absent mindedly. It was wet with rain. It required some time to gather the import of the few words on the scrap she held in her trembling hands.

As she spelled them out slowly, they burned themselves indelibly into her brain.

The paper had been folded irregularly, as if in haste, then set on fire.

These were the words that she spelled out—that swam before her eyes, then became as terrible as letters of living fire :

five hund dol s ntitled also ting thanks Friday ni
oonlight at upper forks oad t fail old pit make
ll rich.

The old pit! Her mother's worst fears were verified. Somebody had discovered her father's secret. The officers of the law doubtless were even now on their way to arrest him. She saw, in fancy, the officers surrounding the place, possessing themselves of the proof that would convict him. She beheld him dragged from his home, resisting with might and main, bleeding perhaps; while her mother lay like one dead—worse—whose waking hours would be like the silence of the grave.

The officers of the government had made an appointment with some wretch who had discovered the truth and betrayed her father for the sum of five hundred dollars. He would lead the officers to the old pit. They were to meet at the forks of the road.

The paper was crushed in her hand. She must think quickly.

"Friday! Today." Why—why yield to despair? Her father must be warned in time. He would avoid the pit, and then they could not imprison him.

The maid looked around her. Perhaps there were other pieces of paper. She found half a dozen, but there was nothing on them. At last she found one piece thicker than the others; evidently a part of the envelope.

When she turned this bit over in her hands and saw the letters written on it, in a large round hand, her heart suddenly stood still. There were only two letters, but they were enough to divest her cheeks of every atom of color.

"ai"—that was all. All? And yet it was only a few minutes since the traitor stood beside her, urging her to marry him immediately. This was the thing—the good fortune that had come to him unexpectedly.

Now she understood why he seemed unlike himself. It was monstrous! Such perfidy seemed incredible—yet she held the proof in her hand. Five hundred dollars! A fortune for them. And she had thought all the money in the world could not tempt her lover to betray another.

The birds chirped and carolled over her head. The squirrels skurried across the road; a great beetle whirled against her cheek and fell unnoticed.

What if the "ai" formed part of the name of her cousin, Sam Baird? Impossibly! Her lover stood there waiting for her. He had lighted the paper and dropped it where she found it. The monster!

Before Sue left the rock where she met her lover, she had resolved upon her course. First and foremost she must discover the old pit, and to do that she must follow directly in her father's footsteps. There was a fire in her blue eyes, and a buoyancy in her step that bespoke a bold, resolute spirit as she entered the forest fearlessly.

The August sun poured its golden rain steadily upon the gray rocks; the air bore to her ears the sound of insects; dragon flies and butterflies sailed over her head; wild bees buzzed among the flowers. Besides these there was

the murmur of mountain rivulets, and the caw of crows, as they winged their way from peak to peak; but Sue Kelsey neither saw nor heard any of them.

Along the mountain side, past jagged rocks, through heavy undergrowth, between great pine trees, she toiled unfalteringly until she looked down upon a wild ravine with steep slanting, rather than sloping, sides. But for the stunted pine and dense underbrush, the mountain sides would have been bare.

Great gray boulders, thrusting their barren breasts through the earth, gave the scene a somber and stern aspect. The solitude was broken by the tinkling sound of a rivulet that slid cooly under fallen trees, and bubbled coolly out again between great boulders and shelving rocks.

As Sue gazed down upon this scene, she beheld a man pushing his way through the tangled undergrowth, until he stood fairly in the shade of a great chestnut tree. He looked cautiously from side to side, then, advancing slowly, crouched beside a pile of stones. The pile of stones looked very odd. Sue remained where she was, looking at it. Then, when her patience was well nigh exhausted, she beheld a thin column of smoke curling up from it.

This, then, was his workshop. And he was quite alone.

Sue made a detour that taxed her strength, and found vantage ground from which she could see everything that her father did. The pile of stones proved to be a chimney built against a rock. There was some sort of a vessel, layers of clay and water near. Her father was crouching over a fire; she saw him blowing the embers; he was on his knees, his cheeks puffed out like a trumpet player's.

She was sure it was her father, but the dress seemed strange to her. Sue moved nearer, nearer. Her foot displaced a stone; it rolled down the hillside. The man at the fire rose upright. She beheld him distinctly one minute; the next he had disappeared. The girl peered intently at the spot; there was no sign of any living creature now; no sound but the babbling of the tiny stream and the whirr of insects.

She stood there wondering if her eyes had played her a trick. But when the solemnness of the place seemed to be growing, she retraced her steps and hastened home.

Somehow the air never seemed so warm as it was that day. Sue Kelsey thought the heat was insupportable—the air seemed to palpitate with it as she approached her father's house. Then for the first time she realized what a pitiful, poverty stricken, neglected thing the farm was.

The little that was reclaimed for agricultural purposes would be scorned by the farmers in the rich valley. The mountain top all around the little field was covered with laurel and stunted trees. Down in the hollows, where some fair soil lay in pockets, sturdy oaks, walnuts, and butternuts grew in clumps; but when Sue turned to look at the familiar stone fences, their sentinel-like sternness oppressed her.

She realized now what poverty was. It was the wretched soil, the fight with nature, that had discouraged her father—rendered him a willing tool for the men who had tempted him to his ruin. It was plain that the owner or tiller of these few acres was condemned to carry on a perpetual struggle with unfruitful land.

Looking over the field where the plough had expelled stones, one wondered why nature, having been so prodigal of stone, had not left them at the base of the mountain, instead of placing them where John Kelsey planted corn and potatoes, compelling him to carry them all his spare time. For thirty years all the odd moments at his command were devoted to the task of piling up stone fences.

Sue thought she understood Jim Bailey better now. After all, what had her father to boast of? Oh why should he exact extraordinary things of the man who married his daughter?

Even the wisp of long, dry grass, thrust into the torn hat of the scarecrow in the cornfield, hanging limp, emphasized the poverty of the place. The oak shingles, curling with age and heat, falling from the roof of the house, the shutterless windows, and the great wooden latch on the door—all bespoke poverty.

Her cousin, Sam Baird, was leaning on a pole in front of the house, digging the toe of his boot in the ground, when Sue returned. He looked up sulkily. Something in her manner changed his mood. He put out a hand playfully, saying:

"We'uns a'n't fusin' yet, be we? Thur now; I'm civil ez the British wuz after Jackson fit 'em. Ha'n't I now?"

"Don't you bother none, Sam. I a'n't in the best speerits."

"Seems to me yer in mighty high speerits. I'm plumb sot on ye, Sue, but if you're goin' ter take me up so pizin quick, I'll make myself so sca'ce you'll never see me hyur again toggin' after you. I kem over ter hev a talk with—ter—well—ter straighten things out atween hus. Thish yer can be fixed in less 'n two minits. Yistiddy ye wouldn't min' me, nor hear ter me—tomorrow 't'll be the same, like ez not. You make out to be keerin' fer nobody, same time I know—yes, I do—thet Jim Bailey's crost the peak a dozen times to see ye, 'n' whut 'ith folks talkin'——"

She turned on him so suddenly that he recoiled a step.

"Sam Baird, I'm jes' et up 'ith you? 'F you 'low you're right, think I ain't ekal to ennythin' a woman must do when she's et up 'ith a man thet's pesterin' her like this——"

"Ther! Don't get riled, Sue. I a'n't so plumb sot. I'll go back home. Hit's my opinion somethin's curled yer temper 'long ther road, but I a'n't a-s'archin' ouf it out. I'm movin' now."

He stopped suddenly, then looked back at her; but at that moment his uncle called to him, motioning with his hand toward the stable, where Sam and her father stood talking in a low tone when Sue entered the house.

When her father came in he was in a silent mood. He reached up to the shelf where the bullet mold lay, and by the time he finished his supper the ladle was hot enough to melt the lead that was soon, speedily dropping out of the mold in the form of bullets. Then he lit his pipe and smoked in grim silence until his wife brought in a pitcher, saying:

"Don't you want some fresh buttermilk, dad? Ther's a lot of it."

John Kelsey snorted. "Buttermilk! Wuss 'n pizin tonight. Whut 'r' ye bringin' me buttermilk fer?" Then, with an uneasy glance at his daughter,

he added, " 'Ther! It's ez good ez spilled out. Mought as well tell at wunst, 'stid o' simmerin' hyur like a pot reddy to bile over. The talk is a railroad's comin' up the cove, 'n' 'f a railroad goes a-raarin' an' a-tearin' 'round hyur—" he paused and looked at his wife significantly—" why, *you* needn't waste no more words. 'Tom Dade 'n' all the rest 'll hev to go traipsin' down ter Chat'-nooga fur—fur-terbaccer 'n' tea 'n' sich."

Then John Kelsey removed his pipe from his mouth and laughed outright. It was a hearty laugh; the first laugh he had indulged in since he asked his wife, " Whut Jim Bailey come ther fur? "

Sue stood quite still with her back to him; she had that moment discovered that she had lost the scrap of paper she found behind the big rock.

Was it possible that her father could be so hardened in his crime, so indifferent, careless of all consequences, as to revel in wrongdoing? Then all the more reason why she should stand by him to the last. His hardihood would cause the law abiding to fall away from him. Though all should abandon him, it was her duty to remain true to him—he would need her all the more.

When John Kelsey left his cabin that night he thought his wife and daughter were sleeping. Five minutes later Sue Kelsey lifted from the rack on the wall the gun left by her brother, who laid down his life on the battlefield.

The rifle had proved her sole reliance more than once, and her trained eye had been as useful in replenishing the larder of late as her father's, experienced hunter though he was acknowledged to be.

The moonlight tipped the barren rocks, silvered the slopes, and crowned the peaks, while the Tennessee seemed a mass of molten silver. Sue sped down the slope with the surefootedness of one accustomed to the mountains.

She did not pause until she plunged into the dense shadows of the forest in a depression on the mountain side. This was the shortest way to the "forks," the place where she had good reason to think she would find her father, and where she would protect him from his betrayer.

A faint breeze stirred the leaves of the trees when she reached the spot that overlooked the mountain path. She could see the forks, and down the main road, two hundred yards or more. She scanned the scene carefully, then examined her rifle.

Satisfied that everything was right, she took up her sentinel-like position and waited patiently. It was not her purpose to kill the informer; she simply resolved that he should not win the reward offered him. Her aim was true; if her nerves did not fail her she would wound, possibly maim, the wretch, let him be lover or——

The sound that came to her waiting ear was a man's voice. Sue Kelsey clutched her rifle fiercely, straining her eyes as she looked down the main road.

Two figures were there, a blur in the moonlight. The midnight breeze bore low laughter to her. Could spies and informers be so careless as that?

The horses' hoofs struck the stones unevenly at times. They were coming into the broad moonlight now. The rays of the full moon fell upon the horsemen. The blood receded from the patient watcher's face as she looked down upon her lover.

Jim Bailey sat as superbly upon his horse as he had near the big rock at midday. She prayed that the shot might not kill, lifted her rifle, and was taking steady aim, when the gun was suddenly wrested out of her hands.

"Tain't fer you," said a hoarse voice. She turned and beheld her father, his eyes burning with hate. "I've suspicioned somethin'. Been squattin' thur hialf ther night. Groun's free to squat in—'tain't free fer informers."

He had his rifle at his shoulder; the horsemen were nearing them. They were less than two hundred yards distant. "Onless my eyes gin out both saddles 'll be empty 'n' half a minute."

"It's murder—you sha'n't shoot Jim, dad!"

Sue caught his gun. The revulsion of feeling surprised her. Her father shook her off, but his finger was on the trigger, and the gun was fired. The bullet cut the twigs at least twenty feet above the heads of the horsemen.

"Run! Run, Jim! You'll be murdered ef you don't!"

That voice sounding in his ears simultaneously with the shot that echoed over the mountain heights, electrified Jim Bailey. Instead of turning and galloping down the road he burst into loud laughter as he shouted:

"Thet you, Sue? Whut do you folks take us fur? Mind how you shoot ther. This yeer's Capt'n Jessup, the railroad engineer, comin' to look at the coal acrost from the old pit."

"Whut's thet about coal?" Kelsey demanded, as he strove to regain possession of his rifle.

"It's dad, Jim," Sue shouted; "he'll shoot—run!"

"Whut!" Here Jim Bailey raised his voice. "Ye kin believe me or not, John Kelsey. Don't be sech er blamed fool! Ye're cuttin' a wuss figger 'n ye think I be, ter bring a rev-noo officer up hyur. Ef you'll come down hyur, I'll sheer the money 'ith ye—thet I'm to git fer showin' Cap'n Jessup the coal crop at the old pit."

"Wonder ef I've been makin' a fool of myself?" said John Kelsey, angrily, as he followed his daughter down the road.

"Cap'n Jessup, thish is Mr. Kelsey, 'n' Miss Kelsey. It's lucky we came acrost you, Mr. Kelsey. Cap'n, he knows jes where to lay his han' on the coal—kin tell us whur the lan' divides. 'N' I reckon he's the only man in the country kin do it. 'N' he knows jes whut wus got out o' the old pit."

John Kelsey felt it incumbent upon him to beg somebody's pardon for the first time in his life. He led the way with the captain. The lovers walked behind, Jim having dismounted and helped Kelsey to mount.

Long before they reached the old pit Sue told her story to Jim in a paroxysm of tears and sobs that startled him.

"Whut!" said Jim, soothingly, looking ruefully in Sue's face. "'n' all about a bit o' paper!"

"I've found it—I thought my cousin Sam picked it off the ground near the door."

Sue produced a small scrap of paper.

"'N' t'other one wusn't ez big ez this? 'N' hed nothin' on't but them two letters? Whut blame foolishness! Sec hyur; the sooner we stop sech nonsense by gittin' married the better."

THE HERMIT'S SECRET.*

BY OLIVER OPTIC.

A story of the Northwest, in which a strange hero figures—Why Paul Gayland left a comfortable home and a doting foster father—His experiences as master of a steam yacht and the strange consequences of a tattooing.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

A THOUSAND dollar bill has been stolen from Ward Gayland, a wealthy resident of the city of St. Paul, and suspicion rests upon his nephew Sparks, and his adopted son Paul. The former is proved to have committed the theft. Mrs. Gayland, however, refuses to believe him guilty, and so much bitterness is aroused in the household that next morning Paul cannot be found, having decided to quit the house. The following midnight the capitalist and his wife are awakened by the sound of persons in the house. Hastening into the hall they see two men rush out, and as they reach the foot of the stairs a younger man dashes past them from the dining-room and both Mr. and Mrs. Gayland are certain that they recognize Paul.

The scene shifting to Lake Minnetonka, Paul is discovered to be the captain of the handsome little steamer Hebe. He goes under the name of Phil Greenway, and has a young fellow he calls "Bashy" for his engineer. During a storm Phil rescues several passengers from a boat that has met with misfortune, among them a Mrs. Forbush, who, as soon as she sets eyes on him, calls him Conny Forbush and declares that he is her adopted son, who ran away from her two years ago. The Hebe's captain listens patiently to her narrative, and then repeats that it is all entirely new to him, and that he never saw Mrs. Forbush before meeting her that day on the lake.

When Phil, after some further adventures, returns to the shanty on the lake where he and Bashy live, and which he calls the Hermitage, he finds it occupied by two intruders, in one of whom he recognizes Sparks Gayland, but who now calls himself, it seems, Gay Sparkland. Unseen, Phil listens to the conversation between him and his companion whom he calls Roddy, and from which it is apparent that not only have they appropriated a large sum of money in Minneapolis that does not belong to them, but are planning to rob a bank. Later, before retiring, they place a traveling bag containing six thousand two hundred dollars in the closet where Phil is concealed. He takes possession thereof, substitutes a wad of paper, and slipping out of the shanty while the thieves sleep, goes to St. Paul, where he delivers the booty to Mr. Cavan, an ex detective, who thinks that Phil has stolen the money and repented. When he hears Phil's story, however, he goes with him to the lake. They pick up a Mr. Westlawn—who had employed Cavan years before to look up some lost children—and when they reach the Hermitage in the Hebe the thieves are still sleeping. Phil announces that Roddy is the worst of them and will not divide the money with Gay Sparkland and Chick Gilpool as he has promised, so that he will probably not discover its loss.

CHAPTER XL.—THE HAPPY PAIR PUT IN AN APPEARANCE.

AFTER the steamer was moored in her usual berth, the captain and the agent took another careful survey of the Hermitage and its surroundings; but there was no sign of life in or near the shanty.

There was nothing more to be done, and the situation was beginning to be monotonous, so that both the captain and the agent began to gape fearfully, especially the former, for he had not slept a wink during the night.

* This story began in the July issue of THE ARGOSY. The six back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 60 cents.

"We are as quiet here as though we were on a desert island in the middle of the ocean," said Cavan, with a long yawn.

"I suppose you know what your next step is to be, Mr. Cavan," said Phil, giving this as a hint that he should like to know something more of his plans.

"I have no more idea what we shall do next than you have, Captain Greenway; if I had I should tell you at once," answered the agent with another long gape. "The next step will depend upon the movements of that happy pair, and our present purpose is simply to let them have their own way and lull them into security by all the expedients within our reach."

"That is just what I should have done last night if I had not been burdened with that money," replied Phil.

"I had that put into the safe at the Ryan while you were reading your time table, and I have a receipt for it," added Cavan. "We may have nothing to do for the next three or four hours, and we may as well turn in, and have a nap while we are waiting; but some one will have to be on watch where he can see what is done, if anything, on the point."

"Bashy has had about four hours' sleep, and he can keep the watch," suggested the captain, gaping till he had nearly dislocated his jaw.

Cavan went to the forward cabin, and took possession of one of the four berths, while the captain called at the engine room to see Bashy, who was entirely willing to take the morning watch, and declared that he was not at all sleepy.

The captain took possession of another of the berths, and soon all in the cabin were sound asleep, for they did not "need a brass band to lull them to slumber" after the occupation of the night.

Bashy had dropped the canvas curtains that inclosed the engine room; the fuel in the furnace had been exhausted so that no smoke issued from the smoke stack, and the Hebe looked exactly as she had the night before when the happy pair went to their beds in the shanty.

The engineer stretched himself on the divan abaft the engine, after he had raised the curtain on the port side so that he could see the shore; but he was not as wide awake as he had protested that he was, for he could stand a great deal of sleep, and he was soon in the same condition as those in the cabin. He was sure, however, that any unusual thing would wake him in an instant; and the captain had suggested that he might sleep on his sofa if he was so disposed.

The bay was as smooth as glass in the early morning, for the northwest wind had subsided, and there was not a ripple of water nor the movement of a human being to disturb him, and he slept as soundly as his companions in the cabin.

It was all of nine o'clock when Bashy came to a realizing sense that he was still a living being, and when he woke he looked at the shore through the opening under the curtain.

The smoke was pouring out of the funnel, which had been carried above the roof of the shanty, and it was evident that the occupants of the Hermitage had finished their long night of slumber.

In accordance with his instructions the engineer called the captain and

informed him that the happy pair in the shanty were up, and appeared to be getting breakfast, for there were two uncooked hams, plenty of potatoes, a keg of hardtack, and a supply of groceries, in the closet, which they would have no difficulty in finding.

"Don't show yourself, Captain Greenway," said Cavan, when he was called. "Not more than one of our party must be seen by the cheerful couple. I have a plan, though it depends upon the movements of those fellows."

"You can go into the engine room, where you can see without being seen," suggested Bashy, who hoped that he would be called upon to take an active part in the drama which was to be played.

The captain and the agent adopted this suggestion, and passing out of the cabin went by the starboard side, where they could not be seen from the shore, to the engine room, leaving Mr. Westlawn still asleep in his berth.

"That smoke suggests breakfast," said Cavan, after he had taken a full survey, in the better light of the sunshine, of the point and the shanty. "I suppose we are out on that score, and we shall have to let our stomachs grumble till those fellows will let us go to one of the hotels."

"Not at all; we have crackers and cheese enough on board to keep you from starving, though they don't make a very nice breakfast for a gentleman," interposed the engineer.

"Trot them out, Bashy; they will do as well as anything while we are on watch," said the agent.

The bucket containing the food was brought into the engine room, and all then proved that they had appetites and were not epicures, for they used up a full half hour in eating the dry breakfast.

From the sounds that came from the forward cabin it was evident that Mr. Westlawn was stirring, and Bashy carried the crackers and cheese to him, with the request that he should remain where he was.

"We may have to stay here all day," suggested Captain Greenway, when his watch informed him that it was ten o'clock.

"I don't think so," replied Mr. Cavan. "Those fellows will be as discontented as we are for the want of something to do. I have no doubt they will hail the steamer if they see any one on board of her, as we must take care that they do."

"Bashy can show himself where they will see him," said Phil.

"Not yet," interposed Cavan when the engineer rose to take the hint. "He must be the only one that is seen. There are the two villains on the shore!"

The agent unfolded his plan for the next move, and gave Bashy, who was to be the only actor in it, full instructions in regard to his duty; and then he was sent out where he could be seen by the intended victims of the strategy.

"Steamer ahoy!" shouted Gay Sparkland, from the nearest shore, though he could hardly be heard in the distance.

"On shore!" replied Bashy, whose lungs were good for half a mile. "Bring off that boat!"

Roddy and Gay seemed to be in consultation over this request; then they soon left the beach and walked across the point; but in less than half an hour

a boat was discovered coming around the point, and it was seen that the happy pair were complying with the request made by the engineer.

"We must all go into the forward cabin with Westlawn," said Cavan, beginning to be fully alive again.

They retired to the cabin indicated, with the exception of Bashy, to whom the agent gave more particular instructions, and the door of the cabin was locked, while the ex detective drew the curtains inside, so that not a sight of the interior could be obtained by the expected visitors.

The arrangements were hardly completed before the boat, which was one belonging to the steamer, came alongside, and without waiting for an invitation the happy pair went on board.

"Good morning, sir," said Roddy, in his blindest manner. "I hope you are very well."

"I couldn't be any better if I had been in the hospital for six months," replied Bashy, with abundant assurance. "I am glad you brought off that boat, for I am a prisoner on board, as I can't swim a stroke."

"Are you alone here?" asked the chief of the visitors, while Gay was looking about the boat.

"Well, I couldn't be any more alone if I had been Mr. Adam in the Garden of Eden before he lost his rib. My engineer went ashore yesterday afternoon, and was to go over to the Chapman House to see his girl; and did not come back at six o'clock, as he promised. I pity the girl if she marries him, for he is a drunken fellow when he gets off, and I suppose he found whisky."

"Who lives in this shanty?" asked Roddy, pointing to the shore.

"I do," replied Bashy.

"Then you are the man I want to see."

Bashy invited them to the engine room.

CHAPTER XLI.—THE YOUNG STRANGER AT THE EXCELSIOR BANK.

BASHY seated himself and his guests in the engine room, and treated them with distinguished consideration, though he knew but little about them.

"We got caught here yesterday in the storm, and could no get away, for the waves were too big for our boat," said Roddy. "We knocked at the door of the shanty; and as no one answered us, we went in and made ourselves at home there. We will pay for everything we had, however."

"Don't mention it; you did just right, and I am much obliged to you for using my humble abode," replied Bashy.

"We like the place so much that we should like to stay there for a week or two, and will pay a handsome rent for the shanty," continued Roddy.

"Don't mention it, for I shall be glad to have the cottage occupied, as I shall have to be away from it for a week or two," responded Bashy in the most gracious manner.

"That settles it, and we are already in possession."

"Some of the scallawags come up here in my absence, and make mischief in the cottage; and as you are gentlemen, I shall be glad to have you occupy the house to keep them out of it."

Bashy was so very obliging that it was quite unnecessary to resort to the claim which Gay had suggested, and the happy pair were evidently greatly pleased with the result of their visit.

"I am very much obliged to you for bringing my boat back, for now I can go up the lake and get another engineer," continued the representative of the Hebe.

"But how are we to get ashore if you keep the boat?" asked Roddy.

"I will pull you ashore, and bring it back with me."

"All right; we have a boat of our own. Does this steamer carry passengers?" asked Roddy.

"As a rule, she does not; that is, she does not carry them for money," replied Bashy, with abundant self complaisance. "I have got money enough to live on, and I only take my friends out in her; and some of them are staying at the hotels, so I shall have enough to do for a week or two."

"We expect a friend to come up today, and we wish to bring him up here; but as you don't——"

"Yes, I do; I do anything of that sort; but if you should offer me any money for it, I don't know but it would lead to a duel," replied the engineer very cheerfully. "But I can't do anything for you till I find an engineer. I can run the boat alone down to the place where I expect to get one; for I won't have Banks after the trick he played on me yesterday."

"We are in no hurry, and any time today will suit us; and we are all ready to go ashore, though I am sorry to trouble you so much," said the chief. It looked as though he did not trust Gay to say a word.

"No trouble at all," protested Bashy. "I am so glad you have consented to look out for my cottage for me that I shall be happy to do anything for you."

The engineer pulled the happy pair to the shore; and they manifested no curiosity to know anything more about the Hebe or the apparent owner of her and the shanty; but before he started he lighted the fire in the furnace.

On his return he was warmly praised by Cavan, who had heard some of his remarks in the engine room by opening a window a little, and Bashy was as happy as though he had won a victory, though he did not understand the object of the plan in which he had been the chief actor.

Bashy attended to the engine, and as soon as there was steam enough the moorings were cast off, for the agent had accomplished all he desired, and even more, for it looked as though the unseen and cautious Chick Gilpool was to join the party at once.

Phil took charge of the engine while Bashy went into the pilot house to steer until the Hebe was out of sight of Cape Cod, as she would be as soon as she reached the narrow passage out of the bay, when each of them resumed his usual duty.

"I think you have got me into a mess, Mr. Cavan," said the captain, when he took his place at the wheel, though he laughed to soften it.

"What makes you think so, Captain Greenway? We shall soon have that happy trio in a very tight place," replied the agent, rubbing his hands at the success of his plan.

"Of course Gay Sparkland will know me when he comes on board of the

boat, and it seems to me that will end the whole matter," said Phil, not a little disconcerted.

"But it is not my intention to have him recognize you."

"How can you possibly prevent it, sir?"

"You must either get another pilot to take your place, or——"

"But I should say that it was necessary for us to watch these fellows all the time," interposed Phil, who did not like the idea of having another person run his steamer."

"I should say so myself; and if you don't object to the plan, I can fix things so that Gay will not know you. I have done such a thing when I wanted witnesses."

"I will do anything rather than hand the Hebe over to another pilot."

"Very well; we shall have plenty of time to attend to the matter before you return to the Hermitage," added Cavan. "Now, where did you say the man was stopping that was so much startled when he saw your arm?"

"I landed him at the Lafayette."

"Who did you say was with him?"

"A lady who was his sister, and her name was Mrs. Goldson; she had a daughter, Sibyl," replied the captain, who wondered why he put these particular questions at this time.

"Mrs. Goldson," repeated Cavan, as he wrote the name in his memorandum book. "Mr. Westlawn wants you to land him at the Lafayette."

"Do I land you there, or do you remain on board to make the trip with the happy pair?"

"No; I shall go to Excelsior; but be sure and leave my friend at the Lafayette."

"Of course I shall do so, though it is somewhat out of the course to Excelsior," replied the captain, wondering if the agent thought he could forget to do so.

"On the whole, I think you had better leave him at the Lafayette after you have landed me at Excelsior," said Cavan, who seemed to be in deep thought all the time. "We had not finished our talk when we got to the cape this morning."

The agent joined the gentleman from Chicago in the after cabin, where he had sent him, and nothing more was seen of either of them till the Hebe touched the wharf at her destination.

It had been decided that all hands should take breakfast at Excelsior, and they started for a hotel for this purpose; but when they were opposite the bank the ex detective wished to examine the premises, in view of future events, and the captain and the engineer walked to the hotel to order the meal, leaving the two gentlemen in the street.

Cavan and his friend went into the bank and looked over the room; and after they had completed the examination they went to the door to leave, when the agent suddenly halted, as a young man came in.

"Look at him, Westlawn!" exclaimed Cavan, drawing his companion back so that he could see the person indicated.

The young man who had excited the attention of the ex detective was not

more than fourteen or fifteen, was well dressed, and looked about him as though he had nothing in particular to engage his attention, for he did not go to the counter.

"How are you, Mr. Cavan?" said the cashier of the bank, recognizing the real estate agent.

"Do you know that young man who appears to be wandering about the bank without any business on his hands?" asked the agent after he had talked a few minutes with the cashier.

"I never saw him before in my life," replied the bank officer.

"I suppose you know most of the people who live in this town?"

"About all of them who live here, but not the summer boarders."

"That young man does not live here, then?"

"No; and I should say that he has not been here long, or I should have seen him before," added the cashier.

"He came up in the last train; I saw him," said a man at the counter.

"Did you ever see anything like it!" exclaimed Cavan. "He is the image of Captain Greenway of the Hebe."

Mr. Westlawn was even more astonished than the agent.

CHAPTER XLII.—THE NEW PILOT OF THE HEBE.

THE resemblance between the young man in the bank and the young captain of the Hebe was certainly very remarkable, and if they had been dressed alike, it would have puzzled a keen observer to tell one from the other.

Still there was something in the expression of the stranger which was not that of Captain Greenway; something that was at least a shade less open, honest and manly, though one would hardly have noticed this difference unless he were skilled, as the ex detective was, in reading faces.

"But isn't that the young fellow in command of the steamer?" asked Mr. Westlawn, turning his back to the stranger so as not to excite his attention.

"Captain Greenway could not have changed his clothes since he left us in the street just now, even if he had another suit with him," replied Cavan. "Besides, I am beginning to note a shade of difference between the two."

"I can't see a point of variation between the faces or forms," said the gentleman from Chicago.

"I see it all now!" exclaimed the agent, clapping his hands together, and walking away from the stranger, who seemed to be aware that he was under notice, and was moving towards the outside door.

"What do you see?" asked Westlawn curiously.

"I have two cases on my hands; and it seems to me now that they are beginning to run together, and I am afraid I shall get them mixed," said Cavan, leading the way out of the bank, after he had again spoken to the cashier.

"What do you mean by that?" inquired the other, to whom the agent had said nothing of his mission to the lake with the captain of the Hebe.

"We shall be likely to see this young fellow who looks like the captain once more, for the steamer is coming down to this place again today," replied Cavan, as they walked up the street to the hotel.

"I never saw such a close resemblance between two human beings as between the captain and that fellow in the bank. I wonder where he has gone," remarked Westlawn.

"You will see him again soon, and I believe your affair is coming out all right," answered the agent, as they went into the hotel, and the subject was dropped.

At breakfast, though it was pretty near a country dinner hour, nothing was said about the matter, for there were representatives of each of the ex detective's cases present, and for reasons of his own he was not ready to mingle them.

"I suppose you will be back in the course of two or three hours, Captain Greenway," said Cavan, when they had returned to the wharf.

"I shall, if I am not detained on the way," replied Phil. "But if I am to leave you here, I do not yet understand how I am to act as pilot of the steamer on the next trip without being recognized by Gay Sparkland."

"I do not know that you will agree to my plan," added Cavan, as he took from his pocket a couple of old corks he had picked up near the hotel. "But here is the key to the difficulty."

"Those corks?"

"These corks. If I am not mistaken, you took part in an amateur minstrel show last winter with my boy. I was in the audience, though I did not know one person from another."

"I see what you mean; and I am to go into burnt cork," said Phil, laughing at the idea.

"All but the opera, for you will not have to sing, unless you prefer to do so," replied Cavan.

"I don't object to the singing, though Gay might recognize my songs or my voice."

"Do as you like about that. Have you any other clothes on board?"

"I have a suit that I put on when I have any dirty work to do."

"All right; and you had better put on your other rig before we leave, for I have business in Excelsior which will keep me here, apart from my desire not to embarrass the movements of the happy pair at the other end of the lake; and you can put on your war paint as well here as anywhere else."

The captain did not object, and procuring the old clothes, he dressed himself for his part in the forward cabin, though not till he had prepared his cork under the boiler; and in less than half an hour, with the assistance of Cavan, who had had experience in this department of professional work, he appeared on deck as a young colored man, who got his complexion from the burnt cork.

The laying on of the color was done better than it is sometimes. He was not "so black that charcoal would make a white mark on him," but just dark enough to show that he was not a white man; and his dress was carefully arranged to keep up his character.

Mr. Westlawn was smoking his cigar on the forecastle, and Bashy was at work in the engine room, getting ready for the trip, and expecting to get the bell to back her at every moment.

"Where is Captain Greenway?" asked Bashy when Cavan showed himself at the engine room, the curtains of which had been rolled up.

"He does not go with us," replied the agent, with a twinkle of the eye, as he glanced at the dark skinned pilot at his side.

"The captain doesn't go with us!" exclaimed the engineer, pausing in his occupation with surprise.

"Of course not; one of the passengers you will bring down from the Hermitage would recognize him if he were on board, to which all of us object," replied Cavan; but he thought the engineer ought to know more than he did about the situation, and he explained as much of their movements as he deemed expedient.

"I knew there was something out of the way, and that you would not take all this trouble for nothing," added Bashy, opening his eyes very wide. "But we can't get along without a pilot."

"The pilot has just come on board," said the agent, pointing at the young colored man.

Bashy looked at him, and did not seem to be particularly delighted with the change, and possibly he had some prejudice against the race to which he appeared to belong; but he said nothing in the presence of the new pilot, who was directed by the agent to take his place at the wheel, which he did, though not till he had looked the engineer full in the face without being recognized.

"I don't know about this business," said Bashy, shaking his head when the pilot had gone to his station. "I thought I knew every man on the lake that knows how to steer a steamer, but I never saw that darky before, and I don't believe he knows the navigation through Priest's Bay."

"I am sure that he knows the way as well as Captain Greenway himself," Cavan insisted; and then, after speaking with Mr. Westlawn, he went on shore.

The new pilot cast off the fasts and rang to back her, though Bashy was very confident that the Hebe would come to grief before she reached Cape Cod, and he kept a very close watch upon the course of the steamer after she got away from the wharf.

The boat took her usual course, and after she had gone a couple of miles, keeping in deep water all the time, the engineer began to have more confidence in the new pilot, though he was quite sure that the passage through Priest's Bay would bother the colored fellow.

"You seem to be a new hand," said Mr. Westlawn, when he had finished his cigar, as he stopped in front of the pilot house.

"Yes, sir," replied Phil, when he found that the passenger did not know him. "But I think I know my way about this lake."

"No doubt of it; but did the captain tell you that I was to be left at the Hotel Lafayette?"

"Yes, sir; he told me all about it; and I know the name of the man you want to see over here," answered Phil, somewhat exhilarated by the success of his disguise.

"What is that large hotel on the left? Isn't that the Lafayette?"

"No, sir; that is the Lake Park."

The gentleman from Chicago was satisfied that he was not going astray in the new hands to which he had been committed, and he seated himself to look at the scenery.

In a short time the Hebe was approaching Minnetonka Beach at full speed, for the engineer had been cautious at first.

CHAPTER XLIII.—A LADY AND GENTLEMAN TURN PALE AND RED.

As the Hebe approached the wharf in front of the hotel, the pilot saw a rowboat, with a gentleman and lady in the stern sheets, pulled by a little girl, in whom he recognized the one he had saved from the angry waves the day before.

Miss Sibyl promptly identified the Hebe, and stopped rowing, while she spoke to those in the stern of the boat, when all of them began to wave their handkerchiefs at the steamer, and the pilot rang the bell to stop her.

"What is the matter?" called the engineer through the tube, for he felt that, in the absence of the captain, he ought to exercise some supervision over the management of the steamer.

"Nothing at all; we are all right," replied a voice through the tube.

"What are you stopping here for, then?" demanded Bashy.

"I know what I am about," responded Phil, rather sharply, and forgetting that he was a person of another color, whom the engineer did not know. "Mind your bells, and don't meddle with my department."

Bashy did not like this sharp answer; but he knew that the engineer was subject to the orders of the pilot, at least so far as the bells were concerned, and he went to the side of the boat to ascertain the occasion of the stoppage.

"Mr. Westlawn, that is the gentleman in the boat that you wish to see," said the pilot, calling to the passenger.

The gentleman from Chicago rose from his seat and looked at the party in the boat with the most intense interest, as Phil judged from the expression on his face.

"Where is Captain Greenway?" asked the little girl at the oars; and by this time the Hebe had forged ahead so far that the little boat was abreast of it when she lost her headway.

"He is not on board, Miss Sibyl," replied Bashy, who was now nearer to the little maiden than the pilot was.

"Not on board!" she exclaimed, evidently much disappointed. "I wanted to see him ever so much."

"We left him at Excelsior," added the engineer, speaking what he believed to be the truth. "He will be on board again this afternoon, or tomorrow."

"Where is the captain?" repeated Mr. Arnold Blonday. "I have a very important letter for him."

"He stopped off at Excelsior; but he will soon be on board again," replied Bashy. "I will give him your letter as soon as I see him."

"But it is a very important letter, and I would not have it lost for a thousand dollars," added Mr. Blonday.

Mr. Blonday consulted with his sister, and after he had done so the boat came alongside the steamer, and the letter was handed to Bashy, who assured the gentleman that it would be perfectly safe.

"Good morning, Mrs. Goldson. How do you do?" interposed the gentleman from Chicago at this moment, as he took off his hat, and bowed low to the lady.

"Why, Mr. Westlawn! Can that be you?" exclaimed the lady; and Phil thought she was not half so glad to see the passenger as she wished to make it appear.

If a ten pound weight had been suddenly attached to the chin of Mr. Blonday, his jaw could not have dropped lower than it did; and it was true, and not a fancy of the captain of the Hebe, that both the gentleman and the lady turned pale as soon as they recognized the gentleman from Chicago.

"I am very glad to see you, and I hope you are going to stay a day or two with us," continued Mrs. Goldson. Phil was sure that she was lying, for her tones and her looks indicated it; and he concluded that the relations between his passenger and the lady and her brother were not the most cordial in the world.

"Thank you, Mrs. Goldson! I am most happy to accept your kind invitation, for I have some very important business with you and your brother; and I have come to this lake on purpose to see you. In a word, I have some news from Paris."

If Mrs. Goldson and her brother were pale before, they both turned red now, and looked each at the other, as though the situation were exceedingly embarrassing to them.

"I shall be very glad to see you," replied the lady, who was the first to recover her self possession. "I am sorry this boat is so small that we can't take you in."

"The steamer will put me on the wharf, and I will meet you at the hotel," added Mr. Westlawn, as he nodded to the colored pilot, and the boat pushed off.

Phil rang the bell to back her in order to get out of the way of the boat, and not trouble the maiden at the oars; and he was wondering all the time what it was that made Mrs. Goldson and her brother turn pale and red by turns.

Then he could not help thinking of the emotions of the gentleman when he accidentally discovered the letters on his arm; and, though he could make nothing of the situation, he felt just as if there were going to be a great convulsion when the gentleman met the two guests at the Lafayette.

But it was none of his business what happened at the hotel, for all the actors in the coming scene were almost strangers to him, and he rang the bell to go ahead as soon as the Hebe was clear of the boat.

In a few minutes more he had landed his passenger on the wharf, and his mission in Minnetonka Bay was ended, though the gentleman lingered on the wharf by the side of the pilot house, and seemed to be in deep thought.

"You are going back to Excelsior, are you not?" he asked, turning to the colored pilot.

"Yes, sir; if we are not detained at the head of the lake, we shall be back there in a couple of hours," replied Phil. "But I believe we have to take a party back to the other end."

"Shall you see Mr. Cavan when you get to Excelsior?" asked Mr. Westlawn.

"Who is Mr. Cavan?" asked the pilot, more for fun than for anything else.

"The pilot doesn't know him; but I shall see him," interposed Bashy, who was standing near the pilot house.

"Will you be kind enough to tell him that Mr. Westlawn wishes to see him before night if possible?"

"I will tell him so," answered the engineer; and the gentleman walked to another part of the wharf, where he could see the boat rowed by the little maiden.

The fasts were cast off, and the steamer was soon under way again, and headed for the Narrows, through which she had to pass on her way to Cape Cod; but when she reached the canal, the Belle of Minnetonka, the largest steamer on the lake, with apparently a thousand passengers on board, was just entering the passage, and the pilot stopped the engine to wait for her to get through.

He had run the Hebe out of the way of the big steamer, and when she had lost her headway, he came out of the pilot house, and met the engineer in the waist.

"You have a letter for the captain, Bashy," said the pilot, when he realized that he and the engineer were the only persons left on board.

"That's so; I have a letter for the captain," replied Bashy; and his tone indicated that he intended to keep it.

"I think you had better give it to me," suggested Phil.

"Give it to you?" exclaimed Bashy, thoroughly indignant. "Not if I know Wabash Wingstone; and I think I know him better than any other fellow."

"I am the pilot, you know," added Phil.

"And I am the enginer, you know," replied Bashy.

"I think the letter is for me; will you show it to me?"

"No; I will not even show it to you! When anything is left with me for Captain Greenway, he will get it if the round earth holds together long enough for me to deliver it," protested the engineer.

"I think you don't know me, Bashy," said the captain laughing.

"I don't wish to know a fellow, white or black, that wants to meddle with letters that don't belong to him."

"But you don't know me, Bashy."

"That is just what I say. I never set eyes on you before."

"I am the captain of the Hebe, and you don't know me, Bashy."

"So is my great grandmother the captain of the Hebe!" exclaimed Bashy, the utmost contempt in his looks and tones.

"I tell you the truth, though I have colored my face," replied Phil, unbuttoning his vest, and showing his name on the face of his shirt bosom.

But the engineer was incredulous, and the pilot removed his clothes enough to show a portion of his white skin; and then he produced his pocket-book, in which his name was written, and began to tell him about events in the past which no other person could have known.

"I give it up; and here's the letter," said Bashy at last. "I have been looking out for you ever since we left Excelsior, for I was afraid you would sink the steamer; and you were Captain Greenway all the time!"

The captain opened the letter.

CHAPTER XLIV.—WHAT MR. CAVAN DID WHILE WAITING.

THE letter which Captain Greenway opened was a rather thick one, and he was not a little surprised to find that it contained quite a number of bank bills, the one on top being a hundred.

As in the letter of the day before, there were ten of this denomination; and the captain was aware that the liberality of Mrs. Forbush had been made known in the two hotels near the middle of the lake, if it had not been published in the newspapers.

"More money," said Phil, as the Belle of Minnetonka came out of the Narrows. "We may as well divide it as we did yesterday;" and he handed the engineer three of the bills.

"Now I know you are Captain Greenway, for no other fellow in the world would do such a handsome thing," said Bashy, in tones of admiration and gratitude, as he put the bills in his pocket. "I can buy a steamer now; and I will give you six hundred dollars for the Hebe as soon as you will say the word."

"I shall not say it at present," replied Phil, as he went into the pilot house.

The steamer went ahead again, and in half an hour she was off Cape Cod, whistling for her passengers who were to go to Excelsior; and when they appeared, they were brought off by Bashy in the boat, who told them that he had found a ducky who was a pilot, but not an engineer, so that he was obliged to attend to the machinery himself.

This explanation satisfied the passengers, and they only glanced at the pilot, as they saw him through the window at the wheel; though Phil, fearing that Gay might recognize him, pulled down the old soft hat he wore over a part of his face.

Roddy and Gay appeared to have changed their appearance somewhat, for they had evidently daubed their faces with the mud they found at a spring near the house, and had combed their hair in an odd fashion.

They went immediately to the after cabin, which Bashy opened for them, and they were not seen again till the steamer arrived at her destination, and had made fast to the wharf.

Mr. Cavan had gone ashore as soon as the colored pilot took his place at the wheel after he had changed his appearance. As he had himself suggested, he had business in Excelsior other than merely keeping out of sight of the happy pair who were to be passengers on the Hebe from Cape Cod. He had not told Captain Greenway what this business was, and he seemed to have

become very reticent, so far as the young man was concerned, however it may have been with his friend from Chicago.

As soon as the Hebe had sailed, he walked up the street towards the bank, where he looked all about the building, possibly to inform himself still better in regard to the premises, in anticipation of the robbery which he believed was to take place there.

He went into the bank after he had looked all about it; and he was not a little surprised to see the young man who so closely resembled the captain of the Hebe at the counter, where he had asked to have a fifty dollar bill changed.

He held it in his hand, but he seemed to be surveying the premises inside of the counter all the time while the cashier was taking the smaller bills from his drawer.

Cavan went to the room in the rear, and from there called the cashier, who came out of the banking room with the money in his hand, and looked with some astonishment at the real estate agent.

"Find out who that young fellow is, if you can," said Cavan in a whisper and without letting the subject of his request know that he was in the room. "It may be important to you."

The cashier bowed and returned to his counter, where he proceeded to ask general questions, and finally if he was staying at one of the hotels, to which he only replied that he was going to camp out for a fortnight with some friends who would come for him some time that day.

Cavan heard all that the young man said, and was at the front of the counter by the time he had put his money into his pocket.

"How are you, Conny?" said he, walking up to the stranger and extending his hand to him, which the young man took, apparently surprised into this concession.

"You have the advantage of me, for I don't think I know you," replied he, with no little hesitation and embarrassment.

"You don't know me, Conny Forbush!" exclaimed Cavan, who was certainly a good actor. "When did you leave Philadelphia?"

"I did not leave Philadelphia; and I am not the person you take me for," protested Conny, so called.

"Nonsense, Conny! What sort of a lark are you on now that you don't know your old friends?" continued the agent, in a tone of raillery. "I see that your mother is at the Lake Park Hotel, and, of course, you are there too."

"But I am not there!" said Conny, beginning to be indignant at the persistency of his new friend.

"If you are not, you will be soon, for the train leaves for Lake Park in twenty minutes, and you are going over there with me," continued the agent, in a matter of fact way, and as though he intended to carry out the program he had indicated.

"I am not going over there with you or any other person!" stormed Conny. "You are a stranger to me, and your conduct does not please me at all."

"I am sorry for that, though I can't help it," added Cavan, as good natured as though he had just sold a corner lot at a big price. "I think you had better take me into your confidence, or I shall take you into mine, Conny."

"Don't call me Conny again, for that is not my name."

"Well, Chick Gillpool, if that suits you any better, and I judge that it does, as you sometimes call yourself by that name. I shall not call you Conny Forbush, if you don't like it, for I don't believe that is your name any more than you do," returned Cavan.

Conny, or Chick, whichever he was if he was either, had evidently been hit where he was raw, for he shrank back and turned pale, looking at his tormentor with something like horror rather than astonishment.

"The C. G. on your arm stands for either of your names, but neither of them is the right name," said Cavan, who seemed to be better posted than any other person who had tried to interpret the mysterious letters.

"I see that you know me," gasped the owner of the names.

"Better than you know yourself," added Cavan. "Now, will you go over to the Lake Park Hotel and see your foster mother?"

"I cannot go today; I expect a couple of my friends to come after me soon to camp out with them."

"It is to keep you from meeting them that I wish you to go to Lake Park. Roddy will only get you into trouble; and you never will get your share of the six thousand two hundred dollars your party of three took from the mansion in St. Paul."

"You know all!" gasped Chick. "You mean to arrest me!"

"On the contrary, I wish to save you."

"Then I will go anywhere with you."

In less than an hour they were in the parlor of Mrs. Forbush at the Lake Park, waiting for her to come out of her chamber, from which she presently appeared; and the moment she saw Conny, she threw her arms around his neck and embraced him as though he had been her own son.

She did not seem to fear that he might be the one she had met before, and possibly she saw something about him that enabled her to identify him certainly this time.

"Where have you been all this time, Conny?" she asked, still holding him as though he might fly away if she released her grasp.

"I think he will not tell you, Mrs. Forbush, and you had better not insist on an answer," interposed the agent. "Are you satisfied this is your adopted son, for you were mistaken once before?"

"I am satisfied, and I was satisfied before; I think I had better look at his arm," replied the lady.

Conny offered no objection to the examination, and the initials of his two names were found there, to the great satisfaction of the rich lady; and she and Joanna examined them with the utmost care.

"C. G. is just what it always was, and the letters stand for Conny Forbush," said she, very much excited.

"Hardly, Mrs. Forbush, though they enable you to identify the young man," laughed the agent.

"The first one stands for Conny is what I meant to say."

"Not even the C for Conny; but both letters stand for the true name of the young man, which is Conrad Goldson."

The lady looked inquiringly at Cavan.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

ELSWORTH'S STRATAGEM.

BY E. F. KNIGHT.

How a brave man learns that the course of true love never runs smoothly—Of his hard fighting and of the great wrong done him by one who should have been his closest friend.

"CREEK Ranch burned. Two men killed in a brush with cattle thieves. Send troops at once."

It was the arrival of this message at Fort Russell that had broken up the little gathering in Captain Black's cosy quarters and sent the captain and his troop whirling away by special train to Iron Mountain, the nearest station to the scene of trouble.

As soon as the troops had gone, Novella Darlington stole quietly to her room. That tender, almost sentimental leave taking with Lieutenant Lathrop had quite unfitted her for seeing any one the balance of the night. With her dainty feet resting on the fender of the grate, she sat thinking it all over.

Three years ago, when a sophomore at college in Baltimore, she had gone to Annapolis with a party of the college girls to see the West Point-Annapolis game; had been introduced to "My friend, Mr. Lathrop;" she had given him her colors—a dainty bow knot of garnet and orange—to carry to victory after a deal of earnest pleading on his part; had seen him, West Point's greatest fullback, win victory and renown for the cadet gray and her by one of the most magnificent runs in the annals of football; had danced and flirted with him that night at the reception the naval cadets tendered their army guests, never expecting to see him again. Then she came to Russell three weeks ago to visit Captain and Mrs. Black, old family friends, and had met him, a lieutenant in Troop C—the captain's own.

And tonight, just as he was leaving, he had taken the little knot of ribbon, now dirty, torn, and faded with age, from the vest pocket of his blouse; had told her how highly he prized it, and how he trusted that it would bring victory to him in the field where the stern realities of life and death existed, as it had aided him in the mimic battle on the "gridiron" so long ago.

She gazed steadily into the fire, two large tears dimming and blurring the burning coals into one red mass; then, going to the mantel, took down his picture. Silently she looked at the smiling cavalry lieutenant in the soft glow of the lamp, gently kissed it, and, as she replaced it, mutely sent a prayer to the Maker that the little bunch of ribbons might prove a guard to his safety and bring him home to her.

* * * * *

Under a starlit sky, dotted here and there with somber wind clouds, on the hard frozen prairie rides Troop C. The blustering October wind sends the

dust whirling in the faces of the silent troopers, causing them to turn up coat collars and pull the brims of their battered campaign hats well down over their eyes. With the practical, easy working of our cavalry doing police duty on the frontier, they are in an incredibly short space of time leaving the twinkling lights of the station home of the operator station master at Iron Mountain in the rear, and are moving at a steady lope toward the Creek Ranch. It is there Captain Black expects to "strike the trail," and render summary vengeance, before the sun of the coming day has reached its meridian.

Hard, sturdy men that they are, there is not one, from the seasoned campaigner to the rawest recruit with but the first coat of his greenness rubbed off, that does not look grave as he realizes the danger lurking for the men whose duty it is to subdue Gentleman Dick and his band of human devils.

Those who were not in the famous chase after him in his notorious raid of two years ago, when he carried away eight hundred head of cattle to no one knew where, and left the cavalry baffled and unsuccessful, have heard about it in all its dastardly details, and there is not a man throughout the troop who is not anxious to "wipe out" the whole band, in order to settle old scores.

The scene of devastation that meets their eyes when they rein up at the still smoldering ruins of the ranch is hard to believe to be anything but the work of drunken savages. From the charred bodies of old Mr. Creek and his cowboy, lying among the ruins, it is easy to understand that they had fled thither to fight their unequal battle against fate.

Evidently angered at the persistent interference, the renegades had turned from their work of looting the corrals and had set fire to the ranch. The cowboy had endeavored to escape the flames, but a little hole in his skull shows how ineffective it had been with those human bloodhounds circling the place, ready to shoot them down at the first dash for liberty.

"My God, sir, I'd give my chances of going to heaven if I could kill one of those fiends!" exclaims an old sergeant, his lips quivering with suppressed anger. As this is the sentiment of the whole troop, the captain feels sanguine of success when once more they take up the trail.

The story ran that Gentleman Dick was a man of excellent education, belonging to a highly influential family, but had left his Eastern home on account of some family trouble; had gone to Leadville, drunk heavily, and fallen in with the hard characters congregated there; and had made himself their leader by that unconquerable perseverance which characterized him.

His elegant manners and tendency to dress well, almost to dudishness, among those rough men with whom a "biled" shirt was contemptuously held as a needless luxury, gained for him his nickname, and was the cause of his own name being cast into oblivion. His fine face and gentle voice—a mask to one of the flintiest hearts that ever beat—was the snare by which many became his victims. Once more, with nearly two score of the slums of the mining camps and half breeds, he is sacking and pillaging the same country that felt his merciless hand before.

It is nearly three o'clock when the captain sends for Lathrop, who is riding with the second platoon.

Thanks to his knowledge of the topography of Southern Wyoming, Black

is able to form the opinion that the trail will lead to Wind Pass. By all calculations, the troops have arrived at the ranch about three hours and a half after it has been burned. Evidently not making over four miles an hour, the renegades are probably about fourteen miles in advance, hampered with the stolen cattle, and riding easily, as they will hardly expect pursuit so soon. That would bring them to the pass about seven. The captain could easily overtake them before that, but would defer the attack till near the entrance, thus compelling them to leave the cattle behind.

"Take your platoon," he continues, "and ride hard for Eagle Pass; it is very narrow, and lies about six miles south. Come up on the other side of the range and enter the western entrance of Wind Pass. Then we will have them cornered. Should the trail not lead there, I will leave orders at the eastern end. Corporal Miller can guide you."

Sparing his horses very little, Lathrop enters the first pass at sunrise, and at just ten minutes after seven the men are dismounting at the western opening of Wind Pass.

Leaving a corporal's guard with the horses, the lieutenant and his men push forward. Here in the rocky gorge they can make better time on foot and do more effective work when the grapple comes.

Carefully they pick their way through those parts of the path where a misstep would mean certain death on the jagged rocks below. Lathrop has ordered no talking; he wants the surprise from the rear to be as perfect as possible. "No noise at all, not till we charge; then yell like fiends," are his final instructions. Nothing breaks the oppressive silence but the murmuring of the wind among the pines, blended with the rippling of a mountain stream far down the ravine.

The sun shines down in all its brilliancy, throwing a checkerwork of lights and shadows from the foliage above on the path. There a boulder has torn loose from its century aged resting place and has swept down the mountain side like a meteorite, leaving a trail of broken trees and underbrush in its wake. A mountain goat standing on an adjacent snow-capped mountain curiously watches the slow, labored toiling of the slim blue line as it wends its way eastward.

"The blamed thing wouldn't stand there if it didn't know we couldn't fire at him," mutters a disgusted trooper who has hunted in vain for this magnificent game, and has never till now been in such fair range, "when the lieutenant has ordered no talking, let alone shooting—worse luck."

Suddenly in the clear, rarefied air, far to the east, the report of a rifle rings sharp and loud, echoing and reëchoing from crag to crag; then the silvery notes of a bugle—the captain is moving forward to the attack.

"Come on, men," whispers Lathrop; "keep close, and be ready for the charge."

It is the boy's first encounter—to be his initiation under fire. His heart is beating like a triphammer, but he is determined to be among the first, and to fight—fight in a way that will win him the praise of his veteran battle scarred father, Colonel Lathrop.

Now a fusillade of shots. A moment later, with full half of Troop C,

Lathrop turns an arm in the pass and throws himself cheering and yelling upon the renegades.

This is totally unlooked for, and tells. With blank looks on their faces, many turn from the fight in front to find themselves between two fires. They had hoped to reach the elbow Lathrop had just passed. Once there, they could have bid defiance to the troops. Utterly bewildered, they stop firing; one or two throw down their rifles, another jumps into the yawning chasm and meets his death.

Then the tall form of Gentleman Dick, still collected and cool, can be seen gesticulating and giving orders to his men. The next moment they are off their horses and have taken to the mountain side, fighting savagely. For a second they check the advance of the troops, then flee dismayed. Once more Lathrop's brave young voice rings out: "Take after them!"

He grips his army Colt's more firmly and goes springing up the wooded side of the hill. A poor fellow close at his heels with a muttered cry reels, then falls, shot through the lungs.

Lathrop sees and hears; it only spurs him on. No thought of his own safety; he is after that fleeting form who killed Ryan.

Now he is nearer, a half dozen sturdy campaigners at his back. The fellow has stopped, has turned, has taken deliberate aim. Lathrop sees the face. An ashen pallor overspreads his own, his knees weaken, his protruded eyes seem fascinated as they feast on that heavily bearded visage. Now the desperado fires, and as poor Lathrop staggers, then goes to earth, the thought flashes through his mind:

"My God, it is Dick!"

* * * * *

Ever since Shepard Lathrop cut loose from the maternal apron strings of West Point and came to Russell, Lieutenant Elsworth had disliked him. So pronounced was this feeling that all saw and marveled at it. Jovial and good natured, the youngster had made friends very fast among the officers, and was petted by all in a way that would have spoiled many another man—by all except the tall, silent, senior lieutenant of Troop F. He held aloof, and for some unaccountable reason would have nothing to do with the boy, until now they never spoke except when duty compelled them.

To use Lieutenant Ayers' botanical expression:

"If Lathrop's presence had been like gall and wormwood before, it was little short of poison ivy now."

Elsworth's dislike had turned to hatred before Novella Darlington had been at the post a week. None of her other satellites affected him like this one. Lathrop had known her before she came to visit, but why he used this previous acquaintance as a pretext for always thrusting himself in her society, was something Elsworth could not understand.

In his own opinion, it was what he might have expected from "such a pup," yet it angered him to see how complacently the junior officers accepted it as inevitable, as he told them, "just as a casual observer, you know."

"Well," replied Murray, a shrewd twinkle in his merry blue eyes, "'just as a casual observer, you know,' suppose you tell us how she submits?"

Then the self appointed observer bethought himself of some unfinished duty, and left the clubroom amid the laughter of the youngsters. They all knew how near home Murray's Irish wit had gone, and appreciated it.

They all knew as well as he that Lathrop's presumption, or whatever it might be termed, had been accepted with evident pleasure, instead of resentment, as Elsworth would have wished, and laughed again at the discomfiture of their gloomy informant.

The fact was that Elsworth had fallen in love with Novella Darlington almost before her début into military life was over. Always reserved, he had kept his secret well.

He did not fully understand himself till the night the troops left for the field, when he had seen Lathrop at the far end of the captain's veranda speaking to a fair haired lass in that soft, modulated voice he invariably used with women. They had not seen nor heard his approach—too intent were they; and as he stumbled up the stairs of his own lonely bachelor apartments he realized how deeply he had been smitten, and blessed the cause that took Lathrop from the post.

For a week Elsworth paid assiduous court to Mrs. Black's charming visitor, and was her escort morning after morning on those pleasant rides up the valley of the Crow; spent as much of his afternoons on the veranda as was possible for a lieutenant whose captain was East on sick leave, and was nearly a nightly visitor at the Blacks'.

"Elsworth is making a strong bid," was the comment among the officers.

He no longer kept his secret, but wooed as only one with an intense Southern nature like his could.

Those among the ladies who had at first put Miss Darlington down as a flirt were now nodding their heads and saying: "Didn't I tell you so?" as their prophecy proved true.

Yet there were others among the garrison belles like Mrs. Cherry—bless their maternal hearts!—who declared that Novella Darlington paid no more attention to that piece of animated mummery than she did to any other officer. What did they expect her to do, when he so persistently thrust himself in her society? Surely no true lady could do differently. With this final clincher they would generally leave the field victorious.

Then the troops came back, to the relief of many, for more reasons than one. Weary and tired, the little column rode back to Russell with half a dozen surly prisoners and three empty saddles.

It had all happened in that first attack, when the troops from the front and rear caught the renegades in the narrow pass. It was there the six had been captured. Corporal Learen, Privates Ryan and Muldoon, and four of the band had been killed in the brush on the mountain side. There Lathrop had been laid low—momentarily stunned; still, the pink scar on his forehead showed how narrowly he had escaped death. For five days the troops searched the mountains, but with no success. Gentleman Dick and the remnant of his party made their escape as securely as though the earth had swallowed them. The stolen cattle had been returned, and as the captain finished his report he only lamented his ill luck in being unable to capture their leader.

So did the colonel, but Lathrop said never a word; his face grew sad then, as it did many times after, at the mentioning of that leader's name.

Now that they are back, Elsworth often finds, when he calls, that "Miss Darlington has gone out with Lieutenant Lathrop," or that his presence breaks up many a pleasant *tête à tête*, and he frets and fumes accordingly, but can see no help for it.

"Faust" is to be played in town Wednesday night, and a party of the "fort people" decide to go.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Black," Lathrop says, when an invitation is extended to him, "but I can't go to the theater tonight. I have an engagement in town," he stumbles on lamely, as he excuses himself. To the astonishment of all, his face loses its ruddy glow, and he becomes nervous and ill at ease.

"Well, he is struck hard and no mistake," drawls Andrews. "Who would have thought Shep would make an ass of himself like this, just because he is unable to be Miss Darlington's escort?"

"Shut up, you idiot," mutters Murray savagely. "Can't you see there is something else the matter with him? He has been acting this way since morning. A despatch was handed him at breakfast; he read it, turned pale, then pushed his chair back and left the mess without a word."

The orchestra is booming away when the party comes in.

"It is too bad," says Elsworth, continuing the conversation, which has been interrupted by the walk from the army ambulance to their seats—"too bad that such a likely young fellow as Lathrop should carry on as he does.

"His football reputation has done more to injure the boy than anything else. People toady to him, and it has—well, to put it mildly, turned his head. Some of his escapades in town, from general report, reflect no credit on him."

He is speaking to Captain Black, but knows that a certain shell-like ear he can just see next the captain's bulky form is listening to every word.

"Elsworth, I think old dragoons like you and me should remember the boy is young and give him a little leeway. Besides, you will generally find that idle rumor amounts to nothing," retorts the captain. He hates to hear regimental gossip ventilated at any time, but it makes him "feel wrathful all over," to borrow his own words, when one of his brother officers does it.

"You see, Miss Darlington," explains Mr. Curry to his escort, with a good natured laugh, "Elsworth has been airing some of his prudish opinions down at the club, and is feeling rather cut at the way Shep took him up."

A warning glance from Troop F's acting commander causes the youth to hold his tongue, lest his affability disclose a choice bit of clubroom gossip, which shows Elsworth with poorly composed dignity listening to a tirade of hot headed retorts from Lathrop, to the amusement of all.

"Right or wrong, captain, look at that box," Elsworth remarks, with a suspicious ring of triumph in his voice, just as the curtain is going up.

All eyes are turned in the direction indicated. There, in immaculate evening dress, stands Lathrop, helping to remove the wraps of some lady. He bows pleasantly, then becomes engrossed in conversation with his companion.

It is the captain, still loyal to his youngest lieutenant, who finally breaks the silence fast becoming embarrassing:

"I will admit that the boy should have said he was going to the theater instead of taking subterfuge behind the excuse of an engagement in Cheyenne. But we have not heard his side of the story as yet."

As the play proceeds all of the party are fairly aghast at the actions of Lathrop. Evidently the woman, elegantly dressed, covered with rouge and powder, is a person any one with respect for their reputation would avoid.

Glasses from all parts of the house are constantly turned upon the couple, and fully as much attention is paid them as the play.

The old captain watches their scandalous proceedings with wrath and mute indignation. From all appearances Elsworth has spoken more truth than Black wishes to admit, and it is with a father's earnestness that he decides to give his junior subaltern a raking over in the morning that will bring him up with a round turn.

Novella Darlington sees what she would not have believed. She blushes with maidenly reserve to think that he, her knight errant, the man whom she had believed chivalrous and true, could associate with that woman.

It hurts her infinitely to see him give up her society, where she had believed, in her heart of hearts, he had been happy and content, for the pleasure of basking in those smiles.

She vainly tries to banish his presence from her mind by riveting her eyes on the stage, but it is useless. The shattering of her idol cannot so easily be forgotten for the mere acting of puppets.

Elsworth, narrowly watching her face suffused with blushes, realizes with feelings indescribable that the tide is changing, that luck is favoring him.

Unable to sleep that night, still thinking of the shallow, hollow nature she had believed so deep, so true, she slips on a loose wrapper, and, seated at the window of her room, looks out upon the moonlit Parade.

The guards are just calling two. Far away at the stables a Celtic voice sends forth the musical, wailing cry:

"Post number five, two o'clock and all is well."

Then she becomes aware of some one on the Parade. She peers through the curtains and sees Lathrop seated on his horse, his boyish face uplifted, shining with radiant love, as he gazes long and eagerly; then with courtly grace he bows toward the window of the room where he believes his lady love is peacefully sleeping and rides away in the direction of the stables.

Evidently he has just left his companion of the theater. He was in full dress then, now in fatigue uniform. She shudders as she notes this, and as she rests her weary head on her arms the tears flow silently.

Early the next morning she is on the veranda, trying to quell the giddy whirl of her head by the bracing air.

She is looking toward the parade grounds, and neither sees nor hears the approach of a tall figure she knows so well, sitting in the saddle with the ease and grace of only a born cavalryman, till he has reined up in front of her.

"Good morning, Miss Darlington. Enjoying the air? Hardly expected you would be up at this hour, after your night at the theater—by the by, how was the opera? I was awfully sorry I could not attend, but I had an engagement in town, you know."

No guilty, shamefaced look there. The same open, frank countenance, bubbling over with animal spirits, his teeth gleaming as he smiles and rants away.

It is hard to think evil of him, he has always been so tender, so kind, so generous; and, realizing that she is forgetting the strong resolutions she made in the still hours of the night, she almost angrily whispers to herself, "Seeing is believing."

She had determined to be calm, collected, and let him see what she thought of his actions. But now that he should hold to his barefaced lie after recognizing her at the Opera House was more than her Puritanical blood could stand. With righteous, womanly indignation, never deigning to return his matin salutation, she gives vent to the feelings of her aching heart.

"Mr. Lathrop, after your conduct at the theater last night, I should think you would be ashamed to speak to any one at the post, *especially* a lady, and I hope in the future you will at least say nothing to me."

Lathrop, like a man in a dream, with his forage cap still in his hand, looks hard at the door through which she has rushed; then he digs his spurs into his pet—the relief of an impulsive nature—and is carried rapidly over the Parade by his wrathful charger.

* * * * *

It is the feeble voice of a dying man, half tremulous, half choked with that heavy weight on his chest, that is speaking. The other, with reverently bowed head, is listening. The dim light from the lamp falls full on poor Elsworth's face as he lies, his head wearily resting on his pillow.

That very afternoon he had accidentally shot himself while examining his revolver. Thompson, the post surgeon, had worked over him till twilight, and still his life was slowly ebbing away. It had been with moistening eyes that gruff old Pills had leaned over the bed and as gently as possible told his brother officer how useless it was to hope.

"If there is anything you want done, Frank, you had better speak now, for it might be too late in the morning."

Elsworth had shaded his eyes, and for a moment nothing but his labored breathing broke the silence.

"Doctor," he finally replies, "I would like to have a few minutes' private talk with Lathrop."

And now, as the boy stands before him, he finds it very hard to speak—there has been such a stern silence between them for weeks.

"Lathrop, I have a long story to tell, and I trust God will let me finish it before I am taken away. I have wronged you, Shep—wronged you in a low, dastardly way that any officer or gentleman should be ashamed of."

The confession, spoken so earnestly, so pitifully penitent, causes Lathrop to look wistfully toward the other room for Thompson; he thinks the patient is raving.

Then Elsworth tells how he met a heavily bearded man, singularly like Lathrop, at the Gold Room in Cheyenne. How he found him to be Dick Lathrop—the lieutenant's twin brother.

It was then he saw an ungentlemanly way of ridding himself of a rival for

the girl he loved. With infinite tact he had broached the subject to the stranger, had found to his secret delight how quickly the fellow acquiesced at the mentioning of a hundred dollars.

It was an easy matter for Dick to shave mustache and beard, and the resemblance was perfect. Elsworth hired an evening dress suit for him, bought the box at the theater, and sent him there with one of the most disreputable women in town.

To prove he would play his part well, Dick told Elsworth, on the bond of the latter as a gentleman, of the enmity he bore his brother, and even more; told how he had led the renegades into Wyoming, cattle stealing; told of the shot that laid his brother low in the mountain fight, and was visibly disappointed at hearing how slight the wound had proven.

To complete the work, he sent a telegram that Wednesday morning to his brother at Russell, asking him to meet him that night at a certain house, stating that he wanted to reform and needed money to go East.

"Be sure and come," he had urged, knowing how easily his brother would fall into the trap—thus making the plans perfect.

"Didn't you suspect anything?" asks Elsworth. He hardly dares look into the clear eyes of his victim.

"Yes." It is with a final effort he speaks, still keeping the even tenor of his voice. "Yes, but I thought it was Dick's own doings. I never for an instant connected you with the work."

"Why didn't you clear yourself of the suspicion hanging over you? I was mortally afraid you would every day."

"I could not," Lathrop replies, "without trailing my honored parents' name through the dust, so I preferred to let the matter stand."

Elsworth is gasping now, but in a second it has passed away, and he continues, in the same monotonous tone:

"My only excuse was my love for her. I would have done anything honorable or dishonorable to win her love. When I saw I could do nothing by fair means I resorted to foul ones, and received my just reward. Though she would have nothing more to do with you, she quietly but firmly gave me to understand that there was no chance for any one else.

"Just say you forgive me, Shep. It is a hard thing to ask of you, but I have only a short time to live, and it will make me rest easier. Here, old man, take my hand—pardon me." Elsworth, with pleading eyes and broken voice, holds his outstretched. Lathrop's boyish heart is touched; stepping impulsively forward, tears in his large gray eyes, he grasps it in his two warm hands.

"I forgive you from the bottom of my heart, Frank."

With a smile on his tired, drawn face, Elsworth tries to return the pressure of friendship.

"Shep," he murmurs, "I know she loves you. Go East and win—it is not too late yet."

When Thompson comes in a few minutes later he finds Lathrop sobbing, still holding the hand already growing cold.

Death, the great Reconciler, has stepped in at last and brought these two together.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF SILENCE.*

BY FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY.

A story of Russia and the Nihilists—The mighty power wielded by an American in the dominions of the Czar and the forces that were combined for his overthrow—Withstanding an emperor to his face.

CHAPTER XIV.—ONE EVENTFUL NIGHT.

A NIHILISTIC bomb, exploded in the cabinet of the Czar at that moment, would scarcely have created more consternation in the minds of the two men than did my statement.

The emperor himself started back in amazement, and then turned his face, white with rage and terror, upon Prince Michael.

The prince, instead of shrugging his shoulders, and laughing at the charge I had made, committed the mistake of turning deathly pale, and at once protesting his innocence. It was that protest that decided the battle of wits in my favor. Always ready to doubt those who were nearest to him, the Czar remembered instantly that I could gain nothing by playing the traitor.

He recalled also many instances, small in themselves, but yet occasions when the prince had deceived him. That he knew I had never done. I had always possessed the courage to tell him the truth, even when it was unpleasant. The habit of truthfulness told then. He believed me, and he doubted the prince.

More than that, I seemed to him to know everything, for it proved to be true that the prince had persuaded him to sign an order for my temporary arrest—or, rather, detention in the palace. It had been done when they were alone in the cabinet together, and how I could have learned of it was a puzzle which he could not fathom.

The more the prince protested, the more certain the Czar became that I had spoken the truth, and while he glowered upon the unhappy man, who became paler and more uncertain in his speech with every effort, I stood calmly by with my arms folded, not enjoying the situation, but determined to win the fight.

"Michael," said his majesty at last, "give me the order to which Mr. Der-rington refers."

I knew then that I had won, and while the prince tremblingly produced it, I waited.

The Czar passed it to me with the words, "You may destroy it, Mr. Der-rington," and then added:

"Prince Michael, you will retire to your apartments and remain there until

**This story began in the October issue of THE ARGOSY. The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.*

I send for you. I will spare you the indignity of an arrest until I know more. Go!"

I did not look at the prince as he left the room, and I have always regretted it, for if I had done so, and seen the agony that must have been written in his face, I might have saved him. I did not believe the charge against him when I made it, and there was no such thing as a direction to any of my men to arrest him.

I charged him with complicity with the Nihilists, solely to get rid of him, and by that means save myself and Olga, knowing that later I could save him; that he would ultimately forgive me, and that I could bring the emperor to regard it as a most excellent joke, for he loved a joke at the expense of some other person.

Indeed, I intended before I left the emperor's presence partially to allay his fears concerning the prince, by saying that my information amounted to nothing more than suspicion, which had been strengthened by his effort to detain me in the palace. But events demonstrated the fact that in making the charge, I had builded better than I knew. I loved the prince, and that episode is one of the greatest regrets of my life. If ever a man was guilty without crime, he was. But I anticipate.

"Derrington," said the Czar, as soon as we were alone, and addressing me in French, by which I knew that I was restored to favor, "you have startled me tonight in a way that I shall not soon forget. Is it true that Michael—ah, no, I cannot believe it, for if he is unfaithful, whom can I trust?"

"You must not cease to trust him entirely, yet, monsieur," I replied. "The charge against him is based upon evidence that may be disproved, but my drag net is out tonight, and the dawn will see nearly every Nihilist in St. Petersburg in prison, or on the way out of Russia. If you had been prevailed upon to detain me, I tremble for what might have happened."

"Tell me——"

"Do not, I beg of you, detain me now. Every moment is precious. My men are swarming over the city, and even now, the prisons are filling up. I must get to work, for this is a matter to which I must personally attend."

"And Michael?"

"Leave him where he is, in his apartments, until I return."

"When will that be?"

"Soon after daylight."

"Then come to me at once. Have me awakened if I am sleeping; but I shall not be."

"I will do so."

"One word, the princess?"

"She would have been murdered tonight by the Nihilists had I not arrested her as one, conducted her through the prison, and thence on to the house of the prince."

"Why did you not bring her here, and place her in my care?"

"She did not like to come. She had a lover once who became crazed, and was killed here in the palace by one of the guards, I believe, so——"

"Yes—yes, I understand. You did right. Stop! One word more before

you go. This conspiracy to which you referred, against the whole royal family; are you sure that you have got to the root of it?"

"As sure as I am that I am here in the presence of the Czar of Russia."

"You have never failed me yet, Derrington;" and he grasped me by the hand.

"And I never will, monsieur."

"Well, go. I shall expect you soon after daylight."

In reality there was little for me to do that night, more than I had already done, and yet it was impossible that I should be shut up in the palace with so much taking place throughout the city, immediately under my direction, and over which it was imperative that I must retain supervision. I knew that there would be frequent demands upon me for authority to do and perform certain things, and it was important that I should be on hand.

I was always provided with the necessary papers for anything in the official line that I might be called upon to perform. This had been arranged in the beginning, the better to preserve the secret of my business in St. Petersburg.

I had innumerable imperial passports signed and sealed in blank, and there was no outside authority, belonging to any official in the realm, which I was not prepared to meet. In short, my power was in many respects greater than that of the Czar himself, for I was always prepared for whatever I might have to do in any or all of the departments of the empire.

The wholesale arrests which I had ordered for that night, I had long had under consideration, and that I had decided to make them a little sooner than was my first intention was due, in part, to the danger surrounding the princess; in part to my own suddenly formed determination to complete my business there and return to the United States; and lastly, to the fact that the last few reports that I had received so nearly completed the knowledge that I had striven to attain, that I came to the conclusion that my work was about done, and that it was time to draw the net.

My salary was enormous and already amounted to a competence, and I knew that if I remained in Russia, sooner or later somebody would find me out, and then there would be short shrift for me between the Nihilists and the jealous nobility, who saw in me nothing but an interloper who had stolen their prerogatives.

My first business on leaving the emperor was to call upon Jean Moret, for his usefulness was past, and I intended to keep my word with him.

"Well, Jean," I said, as I entered the room where he was confined, "would you like to leave prison and Russia?"

"Indeed I would, sir," he replied. "There is nothing that would make me quite so happy as that. Has the time come to let me go?"

"I think so. Are you quite sure that there is nothing that would make you as happy as permission and passports to leave the country?"

"Quite."

"Not even——"

"No, not even that to which you refer, or are about to refer. I have had plenty of time for thought since you brought me here, and I have unraveled the fact that I made a consummate fool of myself. I will not deny that I still

love her, or that I probably always will love her, but I know that she never did and never will love me. That ends it you see, and so I am glad to get away."

"Was it the princess, Jean?" I asked.

"You have been very good to me, Mr. Dubravnik, and I ought to deny you nothing. Still I hope you will not ask me to tell you anything concerning the woman I was foolish enough to love so madly."

"I honor you for that expression, Jean, and I will only ask you one question. You can reply to it readily enough. Do you love her still, well enough so that you wish her happiness, so that you cherish no ill will against her for what she did to you?"

"I would give up my liberty now, to be assured that she might always be happy; yes, even to know that she has left the Nihilists, for sooner or later they will lead her to Siberia. Will you answer one question for me, now?"

"Willingly."

"Has she been arrested?"

"No, and she will not be. She has left the Nihilists; for though I honor you for not telling me her name. I know whom it is that you love."

"You are a good man, Mr. Dubravnik, and in whatever country Jean Moret finds a home, that country will contain a friend of yours."

We had some other conversation, and then I gave him his passports, and sufficient money for his needs, ushered him from his place of imprisonment, and parted with him on the street. That was the last I ever saw of Jean Moret.

From there I made my way to the office of my friend Canfield, where it was arranged that I should receive the reports of my men, and there, closeted with Canfield, I remained until daylight.

Messengers were coming and going constantly, and I knew long before dawn that every plan that I had laid had worked just as I intended that it should. I knew that when the sun rose, there would not be a half dozen real Nihilists at liberty in St. Petersburg, and that the order would be paralyzed and broken throughout the empire.

To just one portion of the night's work, I paid particular personal attention, and that was to the arrest of those who knew Olga and Ivan personally, and who knew of her condemnation to death by the order.

Many of those who were arrested that night were sent to Siberia for life, and others for long terms of imprisonment, but I could not be condemned for that, for they one and all deserved to go.

I was yet to meet with an adventure before I returned to the emperor, however.

After leaving Canfield I went to interview O'Mally—or Malet—and found that I could, without going out of my way, pass the house of the prince, where I believed Olga to be peacefully sleeping, and so I took that course.

I had taken the precaution to instruct Coyle to place a good watch on the house, early in the evening, fearing that there might be a chance that one of the spies of the Nihilists had succeeded in following us, and that they might attempt to assassinate her there. Of Durnief I had not thought again, for when the Czar told me that he had been sent after the princess, I knew that

he would be arrested before he could gain admittance to the house. Later at Canfield's office, I had received the report that he had been taken.

It was just breaking day as I approached the house, and looking up, I saw a light in the room where I had left her, and decided at once that she had concluded to remain in that room and had not thought of retiring.

I could not blame her for that, and while I was congratulating myself that she would not have to pass another night of the kind, I saw the front door swing suddenly open, and the form of a woman, which I instantly recognized as Olga's, dash down the steps, leap into a *britzska* that was waiting, and which had hitherto escaped my notice. Then the horses started off on a run.

I was a hundred feet away. There was not a person in sight, as Coyle, knowing that all danger was past, had withdrawn his guard.

There are times in our lives when we scent danger, just as a hound scents the track of the game that he pursues, and I scented it then.

I knew of but one way to stop those horses, and I used it.

Always a dead shot, I drew my revolver, aimed it at the nearest horse, and pulled the trigger. Then, before the first report had ceased to echo along the street, I fired again. One of the horses pitched forward, dead, and the other, badly wounded, fell upon it, while I ran forward at all speed towards the now overturned *britzska*.

CHAPTER XV.—THE STRUGGLE IN THE SNOW.

As I ran forward, I saw a man—an officer—leap from the overturned *britzska*, draw his sword and prepare himself for my attack, while his *mujik*, whip in hand, scrambled from the snow, and took his place beside him. It was evident that they thought the attack of a very different nature from what it really was.

The wounded horse was struggling and kicking, and I found time to think that there was grave danger that its hoofs might injure Olga, whom I judged to be unconscious from fright or because of the shock, and so, unheeding my own danger in the thought of that which was of more moment to me, I fired a third bullet into the maddened animal.

Then, for the first time, I really saw the men whom I had to face, and my heart bounded with thanksgiving that fate had taken me by that route to the palace, when I recognized Alexis Durnief.

The report of his arrest had either been false or he had managed in some manner to escape; and even then, in that instant of rushing onward upon them, I could not help wondering by what means he had managed to entice Olga from the house where she had taken refuge.

I had two bullets left in my revolver; at least I thought I had, and I raised it and pulled the trigger the fourth time, placing the *mujik* effectually out of the combat, and rendering it impossible for him ever to engage in others, and then, scarcely ten feet away from the scoundrel captain, I leveled the weapon at him and ordered him to throw down his sword.

He only laughed, for he was not a coward, and he knew that death would be preferable to the fate that would be his if he were captured alive.

"So! It is my friend Dubravnik, is it?" he said derisively, and in a tone as cool as though he were greeting me in a ballroom. "You have killed my horses and my *mujik*, why not do the same for me?"

I hesitated.

To shoot a man down like that was against every impulse of my soul; and yet he was armed with a weapon as deadly as mine, if once I should get within reach of its point. I possessed none with which to meet him on even ground. Within the *britzska* was unquestionably the unconscious form of the woman I loved.

"Throw down your sword, or I will certainly kill you!" I commanded again.

"Kill," he replied laconically.

There was no other way, and I pulled the trigger.

There was no report. Durnief did not fall as the horses and his *mujik* had done. He stood unharmed, for the cartridge was bad, or the chamber of my revolver was unloaded.

Instantly he understood that he had me at his mercy, and with a deadly smile upon his face, he leaped forward to run me through.

As he sprang towards me I hurled the pistol with all my strength towards him, and it struck him squarely in the breast, staggering him, and forcing him off his guard.

Then, before he could recover, I sprang past the point of his weapon, seized his sword arm by the wrist with my left hand and threw my other arm around his body.

We were as evenly matched as though we had trained at weights and measurements for the combat, and for a moment we swayed back and forward again, I exerting all my strength to bend his wrist backwards so that he would be compelled to drop the sword.

It seems strange that such a struggle, taking place in the streets of a great city, and the four reports of my pistol, had not attracted attention and drawn somebody to the scene, but the past night had been one of terror, policemen had been called away from their posts, and at that hour, just after dawn, when everything was quiet, nobody heard, or if they heard, feared to come.

In using all my effort to compel him to drop his weapon, I neglected the other necessary points of the struggle, and although I succeeded in my design, he forced me backwards at the same instant, so that I fell beneath him, but I still had my right arm tightly clasped around him, and I hugged him to me with all the strength that I could muster.

With Durnief, it was a struggle for life, liberty, and everything that he possessed, and he fought with all the desperation of a madman. With me, it was life, and the woman I loved, and I fought coolly, knowing that he could not get away from me, believing that I could tire him out, and satisfied that I could prevent him from securing his sword again.

He managed to wrench his hand from my grasp, and he struck me a savage blow on the head with his fist, but I threw the other arm around him then, and hugged him all the tighter, so that he was unable to repeat the blow.

It was a strange combat.

A person ten feet away could not have heard it, for there was no sound except our heavy breathing. The snow deadened every noise that might have been made otherwise, and the air was bitterly cold.

Presently I became conscious of the fact that my opponent was striving with all his might to force me in a certain direction, and I correctly conjectured that he had been able to discover the location of the sword, and was making an effort to reach it. So I bent my energies to avoiding his effort.

My life had been largely one of adventure, and I had taken part in many combats, but never before in one like this, where it was simply a matter of endurance, where neither party to the fray was suffering injury, and where the hope of success was so evenly divided.

Odd as it may seem, while pinioning him thus, so that he could not act on the offensive, I began to conjecture how long we might hold out, and the probability of assistance arriving to end it; and it was the uncertainty of the nature of that assistance that concerned me most.

I have said that there were not half a dozen confessed Nihilists remaining at liberty in St. Petersburg, but there were hundreds of Nihilistic sympathizers, and there were hundreds of others who had become allied to the Nihilists in some extrinsic way, who were in sympathy with the order, but only passively so. If one or more of such were to happen along, the assistance would surely be upon the side of my enemy, and certain defeat and death would be my portion.

If a mere citizen were to interfere, the captain, who still wore his uniform, would secure the proffered aid, not I—he would be believed, not I, and hence I understood that whatever advantage there was in the way of interference was on his side.

Appreciating these facts, I exerted my strength to the utmost to turn the tide of battle in my favor, but I could accomplish nothing. He was as strong as I, though not more powerful, and so I relapsed again into the mere effort to hold him helpless, and to take the chances of wearing him out before assistance should come.

It seemed to me as though an hour passed thus; in reality, it may have been only a few moments, for minutes are long under such circumstances, and then there came an interruption—and a strange one.

“With whom are you struggling, Captain Durnief?” I heard a voice say.

“Olga!” I exclaimed before he could reply.

“With an assassin, who has shot our horses, murdered the *mujik*, and who would assassinate you, princess,” panted Durnief.

“Olga!” I repeated again. “It is I—Dubravnik.”

I heard her gasp, and then, although I could not see her, I was conscious that she deliberately walked around us, to get, if possible, a better view of me, and in that moment, I doubted her; but I tightened my grip around the man I held and waited.

“Dubravnik?” she said presently; but I did not speak again, and the captain also remained silent.

Then it seemed to me as though many minutes passed in another death-like silence. I wondered if she had fainted, or gone for help, or what! There

seemed to me to be no good reason for the silence and the waiting. Why did she not grasp the sword and send its point through one of us. It did not much matter to me then, which one she might choose for its sheath.

Soon, however, I heard a sound directly above me—a sound which a stick might make smiting the ground, and I felt that Durnief shuddered.

In an instant it came again, and his arms relaxed, and then tightened once more convulsively.

Then a short pause, and thud came the noise again.

The tensioned muscles of Durnief relaxed. His arms fell from their clasp around me. I pushed him aside as though he were dead, and for a moment believed that he was; then, springing upon my feet, I was just in time to catch the tottering form of the princess, who, though not unconscious, had spent her last remaining strength in the third blow. Her left hand held Durnief's sword. In her right was the *mujik's* heavy whip, and I saw that she had used the butt of it with which to rescue me.

"I stood for a long time with the sword pressed against his back, where it would pierce his heart," she said in a low whisper. "I wanted to kill him, but I could not. Then I secured the whip, but I had not the strength to strike. It was the *mujik* who came after me. He brought a note signed by you, saying that my brother had been wounded, and was at my house; that it was safe for me to go there now. I hastened. I ran to the *britzka* and sprang inside before I knew that it was occupied. Durnief seized me, something was wrapped around my head, and I did not know more until I crawled from the overturned *britzka* and saw you struggling in the snow. I was dazed then, and very weak. I did not remember what had happened; I thought at first that it was Durnief whom I should assist, and I stood there watching you struggle for a long time trying to remember.

"Then recollection came. Then I remembered who Dubravnik was. Is it not strange that I should have forgotten? Even for a moment is it not strange that I should have forgotten?"

"No, dear, no," I replied.

"Then I found the sword in the snow, and then I remembered that I wanted to kill Durnief, and I put the point against his back. But I could not press upon it. I tried, but I could not do it.

"It was horrible, Dubravnik, horrible. I did not know what to do, but my eyes fell upon the whip and I secured it. There! See! He is reviving. Seize him, for he must not escape."

CHAPTER XVI.—WHAT THE CZAR FORGOT.

I TOOK Olga back to the house of the prince, where I was well known to every servant, for I had been a constant and an honored guest there. From there I despatched a messenger to Malet, and to Coyle, and I soon turned Durnief over to the tender mercies of the former, while the latter brought a conveyance which took us to the home of the princess.

Having seen her safely inside her own door, and given her every assurance of her entire safety, I had myself driven to the palace.

Although I had promised to see the emperor as soon as I arrived, I felt that it was my first duty to interview the prince in the hope that the events of the preceding day might be reviewed in a better spirit than that in which they had been encountered.

Accordingly I proceeded at once to his apartments, for the captain of the guard assured me that his majesty was still sleeping, not having retired until nearly daylight.

When I rapped upon the door of the room occupied by Prince Michael as a sleeping apartment, there was no response, and I repeated the summons more loudly than before.

Still I waited in vain, and at last, feeling some misgivings, and being assured by the guard in the corridor that the prince had not left the room since he entered it the preceding evening, I turned the handle and entered.

The prince was seated in a chair near one of the large windows, and the sun was shining full upon him, but the moment that my eyes discovered him, I started with horror, for I knew that he was dead.

Instantly I stepped back through the door and told the guard to call his captain, pointing out the lifeless form of the prince, and ordering him to tell nobody but his superior officer of the fact. Then I reentered the room and approached the form of my former friend.

There was a pistol beside him on the floor, where it had fallen from his nerveless grasp after the fatal deed was performed, but he reclined as easily in the chair as though he had dropped asleep naturally, for a short nap, instead of forever.

"Poor Michael!" I murmured. "Did I drive you to this? Would that I had not spoken."

I turned, then, to glance around the room, professional instinct getting the best of me, even in that moment of sorrow, and I quickly espied a letter upon the table.

It was addressed to his majesty, the emperor, and was tightly sealed, so I placed it in my pocket and started to leave the room.

At the door I met the captain of the guard with two of his men, and them I instructed to keep watch, but on no account to touch anything without his majesty's permission. And then I sought him.

"Well, Derrington?" he asked, as soon as I was in his presence. "What of the night? Is the conspiracy crushed, and have you been successful?"

"Entirely so. Nihilism is effectually crushed for many years to come. My work in St. Petersburg is really done, I think. At least, I can assure you that you will have no cause to fear the hand of an assassin for a long time; until this weed starts up anew."

"We are safe, then. Thank God for that."

"You are perfectly safe. The prisons are full to overflowing. I have sent many of the less guilty ones over the border with instructions not to return for many years to come. You will miss a few faces at court. You will be forced to fill a few vacancies in the army. The next caravan across Siberia will be a larger one than the last, and the population of this city will be depleted by nearly three thousand souls, counting all that I have enumerated."

"This is glorious news to awaken to—glorious! I cannot repay you the debt I owe you, Derrington."

"Now that you have heard the good news, can you bear to hear some that is not so good, monsieur?"

"What! Is there bad news, also?"

"Necessarily, there must have been some fatalities."

"Ah! Some one was killed? Some friend of mine?"

"Yes. Some one has killed himself."

"Durnief?"

"No. He is a prisoner."

"Why keep me waiting? Tell me at once."

"I greatly fear, your majesty, that I am responsible for this death. Here is the letter that he left. Read it. I do not know what it contains. I only just now discovered the body."

"*Michael!*" he exclaimed, as soon as he saw the handwriting.

I made no reply, and he broke the seal and read the contents, and I saw moisture gather in the eyes of the Czar as he read the last words of his lifelong friend.

Presently he returned it to me.

"Read," he said, and I read.

MY FRIEND,

In death, qualities of rank cease, hence I address you as I have always felt towards you—as my friend. Derrington was right, he told the truth, and I lied. I am not and have never been a Nihilist in spirit, but it is true that I am one in fact. I joined them in a moment of folly, to protect a friend whom I knew to be one. I have never allied myself to them, and have never attended one meeting of theirs. The friend for whose sake I joined has been generous, and no demands have been made upon me; nevertheless, I am guilty. Yet believe me, my friend, when with my last breath I assure you that I have never harbored one disloyal thought towards you or yours, and I should unhesitatingly have betrayed them, had I ever known of a single circumstance inimical to you. But I can live no longer under this disgrace, so I die. I beseech you, let not the truth of my dishonor be known abroad. I was unjust to Derrington, and I crave his pardon. I loved him as a brother, and as brothers quarrel at times, so did we. He is faithful; trust him. May God lead you in the right; may he preserve your life and your empire, and may he have mercy upon me.

MICHAEL.

Alexander was true to his friendship for Prince Michael. He mourned him sincerely, and nobody ever knew the true cause of the prince's death. The emperor respected the last wish of his dead friend.

There was yet more mischief to be done, however, by that arch villain, Durnief, for while we were still occupied with the care of Prince Michael's remains, the Czar sent for me in haste.

"This is a day of surprising missives," he said. "Here is another letter for you to read."

I took it in my hand and glanced at the signature.

"Durnief," I said with a sneer. "Why should I read it? The man cannot tell the truth."

"Because I desire you to do so."

The note began in the usual form of addresses to the emperor and read as follows :

You have ere this been informed, and furnished with proof that I am among the ranks of your enemies, the Nihilists. I confess it, but I became one with them for selfish motives, not for political ones. Never mind that. It is not my intention to intercede for mercy, for I know that your heart is a stranger to that quality. It is to tell you a truth that you should know. It is to tell you that the one most dangerous of all the Nihilists, is to go free ; is to remain in Russia ; is to have access to your palace ; is spared by your trusted spy, Dubravnik ; is upheld by him. This Nihilist to whom I refer, has been, ever since the death of my one time rival, Stanislaus, the most dangerous of all the extremists. This Nihilist leader is a woman, and her name is Olga d'Echeveria. Dubravnik will spare her ; he will spare her brother, who is as violent as she is.

One last word. I will never go to Siberia, for I have the means to cheat you out of the pleasure of sending me there, and when you read this, I shall have been an hour dead.

ALFRED DURNIEF.

"Well," demanded his majesty, "what have you to say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!"

"No."

"Have you arrested her?"

"I have not."

"Where is she now?"

"In her own home. I took her there this morning. Listen for a moment, and I will tell you how that occurred."

Then I related in detail the story of my struggle with Durnief, the rescue of Olga, her heroism in assisting me, and told of the final capture and imprisonment of the captain.

But his majesty shook his head in doubt.

"I believe Durnief's letter. She is a Nihilist," he said. "She must be arrested."

I shook my head, but he did not see the motion and continued :

"I believe that the princess is the friend to whom poor Michael referred. He was in love with her, and nothing short of the love of a woman could have made him disloyal to me. Yes, I believe that she is what Durnief says she is. I order you to place her under arrest at once."

"She shall not be arrested," I said coldly.

"What!" he cried, "you *dare* to disobey me?"

"Yes," I replied, "I dare to disobey such an order as that. It shall not be."

"Are you a traitor, also? Was Michael right?"

There was that sneering smile upon his face now, but I held my ground.

"I am not a traitor, but I will not carry out your request, and I will not permit it to be carried out."

He was aghast at my effrontery. He could only gaze at me in amazement, too greatly confounded for speech, and I continued :

"Listen to me one moment, your majesty."

"I will not listen to you. The road to Siberia may be traveled by you as

well as by the fiends whom you apprehended last night, and by heaven, you shall follow it!"

"You forget one thing," I said. "You have forgotten——"

"What have I forgotten?"

"The Brotherhood of Silence."

"Bah!"

"I foresaw this moment, your majesty, and my men have their orders to meet it. If I am molested, every Nihilist who was arrested last night—every one who was in prison in the city before that time—will be liberated in an hour, and you have not soldiers, nor policemen enough to stop the tide that will flow against you then. Your empire will crumble like dust, and your life will go out like the snuffing of a candle. For the present, I am the Czar of Russia, and you are only Alexander Alexandrovitch."

He sat still and looked at me with staring eyes.

"You are only a man, after all, monsieur," I continued more softly. "In your fears for the safety of your family, for your empire, and for yourself, you are led to do unjust things. Only an hour ago, you said that you owed me a debt that you could never repay."

"You do owe me a debt, and you can repay it if you will forget for a moment that you are a monarch, and remember that you are a man."

"You can repay all you owe to me, and more, if you will still be my friend, and forget that this scene has occurred, and when you have done that, I will tell you that Olga d'Echeveria is to be the wife of Daniel Derrington; is to leave Russia forever with her husband, and were she the worst Nihilist in the empire—and I know that she is not—she will be far away from any temptation to do you harm, and under the guidance of one who has proven his devotion to you."

"I will tell you more: That I will leave the direction of the affairs of the Brotherhood in the hands of one of my men who is as expert as I am, and who is in every way as worthy of your confidence as I have proven myself to be—Canfield."

The Czar rose unsteadily to his feet and came towards me with his right hand extended.

"Derrington," he said slowly, "I have been unjust. If I had other friends like you, who dared to tell me the truth as it is, and not distorted out of all recognition—if there were others here who dared to defy me, when defiance alone will make me see things in their right light, Russia would be better for it. Go to Olga d'Echeveria. Tell her that I wish her to come here. Tell her that the Czar of Russia will ask her forgiveness for an act that he could not avoid committing. She will understand. You shall be married in the palace, and you will both remain in Russia."

Then he put his arms around me in Russian fashion and bade me go.

CHAPTER XVII.—WHAT LOVE TAUGHT.

ALL this time I had forgotten Ivan, whom I had left bound and helpless in my own rooms, so now I hastened to him with all speed.

Poor chap, he was nearly done up by the strained position he had been compelled to maintain for so long a time, but I have always thought that it did him good. It gave him an opportunity for the sort of meditation that he had never had before. Every time the temptation to break his bonds and escape came to him, he remembered that he must remain where he was for the sake of the sister he loved so well, and I found him weak, but firm in the determination to await my coming.

I unbound him, gave him food and wine, and as soon as he was sufficiently recovered, ordered my *britzka*, and took him to the princess.

I made him wait until I had told her of my last interview with the Czar, and had secured her reluctant consent to go to the palace with me. Then I left them alone together, and what passed between them, I never learned. I only know that when I was called into the consultation, Ivan offered me his hand, which I grasped warmly.

"You are to be my brother," he said, "and Olga says that you are going to your country to live. May I go with you? Will you let me be your brother indeed?"

After that, we three passed a very happy hour together, and then I hastened away, with the assurance that Olga would go with me to the palace that evening. I had told her of the death of Prince Michael, and that destroyed the last remnant of feeling she had for the Nihilistic tendencies of the times.

Weeks afterwards, when we were on the deck of the steamer that was taking us to my own country, as we stood together overlooking the moonlit sea, she reached up, and with one of her soft, fair hands, turned my face towards hers. It was a little gesture that was natural to her, and I loved it.

"Dubravnik," she said—she insists that she will always address me by that name, because it is the one by which she first knew me—"I do not know myself any more. I am not the same woman who was once so vengeful. Love has taught me how to forgive, love has made me over again. I am no longer the same Olga."

"No," I said lightly, "for now you are Olga Derrington."

THE END.

BOREAS PINXIT.

YE winter wind doth blow amain
On Sunday down ye street,
And blossom on each maiden's face
Two winter roses sweet.

And as unto ye church they go,
With petticoats aswirl,
Each ewe lamb of ye flock is like
Ye full blown poster girl.

Wood Levette Wilson.

MISS WHITE'S FORMER HUSBAND.

BY FRANCIS M. LIVINGSTON.

A sojourn in a peculiar colony—The circumstance that caused Mrs. Major Bright to be surprised for the first time in twenty years.

IT was in the elevated train that I first heard it. A framed advertisement hanging opposite me read :

DE VORSEAU.

A quiet and elegant country retreat, where eligible persons may enjoy seclusion or congenial society.

Lots \$200 and upwards.

Then followed the name and address of the agent.

I did not, at the time, observe the rather peculiar wording of the advertisement. The name of the place was what struck me forcibly.

De Vorseau ! It had a musical, euphonious sound as I repeated it to myself, and it went so harmoniously with the name of a document I had received from Sioux Falls a few days before.

I had decided to leave New York as a place of residence. The "congenial society" in the advertisement did not attract me. The "seclusion" did. I wanted to get away for a season from sympathizing friends, from curious acquaintances and from even my own kith and kin.

My plan was broken up and my house advertised for sale. Where my wife—now my wife no longer—would go, I did not know. Yes, I went to De Vorseau and see what it was like. I laughed aloud—a little. I repeated the name again.

I called on the agent. The place, as he described it, was a paradise. I took one of the circulars and agreed to run up on the afternoon train.

As I turned to go the man said, with a slight show of embarrassment : " I suppose, sir, you know the requirements? "

" What are they? "

" To be eligible to own property or to reside in the community of De Vorseau, one must have been divorced."

" How is that? " I asked in astonishment.

The agent referred me to the circular which I held in my hand. De Vorseau, I found, was a community in an inclosed park, having rules and regulations like Tuxedo.

It had been founded a decade before by a wealthy lady with an unhappy connubial experience. She had retired to this lovely spot on the banks of the river, where she built a country house and gathered about her several friends whose experience had been similar to her own.

That was the beginning of De Vorseau, and when its founder died she left

a fortune to be used in improving it and carrying out her idea. The place was to be a haven for all who wished to escape the notoriety which so often attaches to those who have broken, or have had broken for them their matrimonial ties.

Here every man was as good as his neighbor, and the record of each woman was as clear as that of her sister—at least that was the theory. All met on equal ground, and no one from the outside world with a record of years of unbroken matrimonial happiness or single blessedness was allowed to obtain a footing in this community of assorted half pairs, to create envy or dissatisfaction among them.

The idea struck me as being so delightfully ludicrous, together with the coincidence of my being an eligible, that I was more than ever determined to take up my abode in De Vorseau.

I took a train that afternoon and visited the place. It was situated on high ground, overlooking the river.

In the center was a handsome clubhouse, surrounded by several hundred cottages. The community was regularly laid out in streets, which were well paved and lighted by electricity. I liked De Vorseau, and the people I saw there impressed me favorably.

I returned to the city, and the next day presented my credentials to the agent, paid my initiation fee, and purchased two lots.

The first few weeks of my stay at De Vorseau were very pleasant. I lived at the clubhouse, where I made many agreeable acquaintances. They were, of course, all ex husbands, like myself, and a few of them had ex wives living in the community. I received a number of invitations to dinner parties, musicales, and amateur theatrical entertainments, procured for me by my new friends. After a while I accepted some of them.

I found society at De Vorseau charming, and accepted more. Soon I had a speaking acquaintance with everybody in the place.

A lady with whom I was greatly taken was Mrs. Bright. She lived in a handsome house on Separation Street, the principal thoroughfare of De Vorseau. As everybody talked with the greatest frankness of the chief requisite for membership in the community, so the very names of the streets suggested it.

There was Division Street, Counsel Street, Decree Street, and Alimony Avenue. Others, as though in a sportive vein, were called Matrimony Street, Connubial Street, Affection Avenue, and Union Place. The clubhouse was in the center of a square known as Correspondent Court.

Mrs. Bright was a handsome, stately woman, with brilliant dark eyes and snowy hair. She told me during our first interview that she had had three husbands. One of them was dead; another was in London; a third lived in De Vorseau with his new wife.

"At first it was rather embarrassing when we met," she said, "but a woman of the world soon learns to make the best of everything. I could not live peaceably with Major Bright, but his wife seems to be able to do so. There is no reason why we should not be friendly, and we have exchanged calls several times."

Mrs. Bright was a cultivated and charming woman. She had lived much abroad. She knew everybody in De Vorseau, and gave me all their histories in the most delightful and piquant manner, but without a trace of malice.

I grew to prize very highly, and to look forward to, the evenings spent in her company, and I dined with her regularly twice a week. She was so agreeable in manner, and seemed to have such an even temper, that I marveled at her having been so unfortunate as to be bound to three incompatible men.

I asked her one evening what provision was made for the future of the children of De Vorseau. I knew there was a large and well conducted school a mile or two up the river, where they were housed and educated; but what was to become of them when they arrived at maturer years?

Mrs. Bright replied that this was a question which was just beginning to cause a great deal of discussion among the older members of the community. It had been about decided to add an amendment to the by laws of De Vorseau prohibiting any unmarried woman of over thirty years and any bachelor past forty from remaining in the community.

If, however, in the third generation, there were no rupture of the marriage tie, the property inherited from the original purchaser was to revert to the trustees, and the happy pair withdraw from the paradise of the ill mated.

I often thought of Clara, my wife that was; sometimes longingly, for I found the bachelor life at the clubhouse very depressing at times, and I regretted that my wife's temper had been such that it was impossible for us to continue under the same roof.

Then I would hie me to the cozy parlor of Mrs. Bright, and in the warmth of her smile and the pleasant flow of her ready wit try to forget that I had a wife in Chicago, or New York, or wherever she might be, for I did not know.

I think Mrs. Bright's experienced eye began to detect signs of a warmer feeling toward herself than one of mere friendship springing up in my heart. One evening she quite took me aback by saying:

"Mr. Wheatleigh, you seem to me to be a very domestic man. I am sure you would be much happier married."

Before I could reply, she went on: "Do not make another mistake in selecting a wife, however. We have many women here in De Vorseau who are delightful friends, yet who would make very bad wives. Those who have had the greatest experience in matrimony are the worst, I fear. I can say this, because I myself have been, as you know, thrice married; and I have resolved that I shall never tempt fate again by running the risk of making another man, as well as myself, miserable.

"Now I met yesterday, at the house of Mrs. Lemonde, who has just returned from Sioux Falls, a Miss White, who is quite the most charming woman I have seen for many a day. You will meet her on Friday evening at Mrs. Lemonde's, and I wish you to pay particular attention to her. She is going to make her home here, and we must all try to make her forget her unhappy past with a husband who——"

"But I thought you said *Miss White*?"

"So I did; she is an eligible, however. She is just from Sioux Falls, and has resumed her maiden name—why, what is the matter, Mr. Wheatleigh?"

I steadied my voice as well as I could.

"Mrs. Bright, my former wife was a Miss White. Can this be she?"

"Oh, dear, no; impossible. This lady has had a very sad experience—I have heard it all from Mrs. Lemonde. She was tied to a man with a most ungovernable temper—a perfect madman; now fancy that being you, Mr. Wheatleigh," and Mrs. Bright laughed her musical contralto laugh.

"What is she like?"

"One of those persons whom it is impossible to describe except to say that she is adorable. I shall not rave over her, though, or do anything to influence your first impression of her on Friday night. Only be prepared to like her very much indeed."

* * * * *

Mrs. Lemonde's handsome parlors were filled with gaily attired guests. I had scarcely made my greeting to my hostess when Mrs. Bright glided up to my side.

"Come with me," she said.

She led me toward a semicircle of half a dozen men standing with their backs toward us. I could distinguish some rose colored drapery on the sofa which they faced, but nothing else.

Mrs. Bright stretched out a snowy hand, and the semicircle parted

"Miss White, allow me to present Mr. Wheatleigh."

I turned fairly cold, and scarcely dared raise my eyes as I bowed to Miss White, for I knew what I should see. The next instant I felt a flash of grateful pleasure. My former wife was the handsomest and the best dressed woman in the room.

I had never seen Clara look so beautiful as she did now, in an evening dress of pale rose, with my wedding present to her, a diamond necklace, round her throat. Her color was fresh and rich. She was evidently improved by her Western trip.

My arrival had interrupted the conversation. I tried in vain to stammer out something, but could not, and felt myself growing red as a lobster.

Clara broke the silence.

"Mr. Wheatleigh and I are not quite strangers," she said.

"No, we have met in New York," I managed to get out; "I am glad to know you are coming to live among us; I hope you will find De Vorseau agreeable."

"If I can find rest and oblivion here, it is all I ask," she said, and half turned away.

I could think of nothing else to say, and as Clara did not again address me, I moved away.

A little later I passed her in the conservatory. I had Mrs. Bright on my arm, and Clara was with a tall, military looking man with a very red face.

"I am doing this for you," Mrs. Bright murmured, as her cheeks grew rosy; "that is my former husband."

"Major," she called softly, "I wish to speak to you very particularly; Miss White will, I know, excuse you for a little while. Make the most of your opportunity," she whispered to me.

The major brought his heels together and bowed, first to Mrs. Bright, then to Clara, who took her hand from his arm. My wife and I stood alone beneath an orange tree.

"I hope your stay here will bring you the oblivion you desire, Miss White," I said. "I have heard your sad story; it must have been intensely unpleasant to be tied to a madman with an ungovernable temper."

This diplomatic speech was made with an effort at a courteous, sympathetic tone.

Clara laughed lightly.

"How quickly news travels!" she said. "I had scarcely been in De Vorseau an hour before your deplorable experience was related to me. A virago with a passion for dress and flirtations. You are indeed well rid of such a creature."

"Who has dared——" I began.

"Oh, I have a number of kind friends here," said Clara, with the least little curl of her short upper lip, "but the story seems to be quite generally known. I am not condoling with you, however, Mr. Wheatleigh, for it is also said that you are a subject for congratulation. Mrs. Bright is a very superior woman, I hear; Major Bright told me so, and he should know. Allow me."

She held out her hand. As I took it I glanced upward at the tree.

"Once when you gave me your hand you wore those flowers," I murmured.

"Mrs. Wheatleigh Number Two will not wear them," she said mischievously. "Do you not shudder at becoming Mrs. Bright's fourth?"

"Clara, I am not going to marry Mrs. Bright. She has determined never to marry anybody."

"Oh, so you have asked her and been refused? Then it is condolence after all!"

"She is a charming woman, and a warm friend of mine. It was she who told me of your unhappy experience, and, strange to say, she was certain that I would fall in love with you."

"And become my consoler? How delightful! Take me to the major at once, that I may tell him what a very superior woman I have discovered his ex wife to be."

She put out her hand as though to take my arm. I seized it and kissed her gloved fingers.

"When I first saw you tonight," I said, "radiant, beautiful—a queen among all the women in these rooms—I was proud of you. I longed to cry out: 'This was my wife—this woman belonged to me. She loved me once, and I love her still!'"

"Why did you drive her from you if you loved her?"

"Why? Oh, Clara, you can say that to me! Listen, Clara; you are more beautiful tonight than I have ever seen you, and it is not because your skin is fairer, your cheek rounder, or your eye more bright; it is because that looking down into those dear eyes I see there a tender, chastened expression—something which speaks of gentleness, of sympathy, of forbearance, and—yes, of suffering. Clara, if I thought I had caused you to suffer I should be most miserable, but if I could dare to think—to hope—that it might be only a regret

—a longing—that you yearn for the old times as I do—oh, Clara, I should be so happy!”

I still held her hand. She laughed a little uneasily.

“Of what good is it to talk like that? What is done is irrevocable.”

“Not if you love me. Oh, say you do, Clara, my darling, as I love you!”

“What an ardent lover you are, to be sure; far more so than you were the first time.”

“I know far better the value of the prize, and we both shall have learned——”

“What?” she asked, as I paused.

“To forbear, and to love always,” I whispered, with my lips close to her ear.

“It cannot be,” she said suddenly. “I could never bring myself to accept what that old woman with three pasts has refused.”

“Clara,” I cried, “it is not as you think.”

“You never asked her to marry you?”

“Never.”

“And will you take me away from this horrid place tomorrow?”

For answer, I took her in my arms and held her close, while I pressed a long kiss upon the lips of my former—my future wife.

When I looked up, at last, a pair of statues stood in the doorway—the major and Mrs. Bright.

Clara glided from my arms and disappeared behind the trees.

The major wheeled about and marched through the door.

“You are an apter pupil than I thought you, Mr. Wheatleigh,” said Mrs. Bright calmly.

“My dear preceptress and friend,” I cried, advancing and holding out my hands to her, “how can I ever thank you?”

“Mr. Wheatleigh, I cannot say I am surprised,” said Mrs. Bright. “I have lived through too much to be surprised at anything; but I will acknowledge being curious.”

“Then I will tell you, dear lady. I saw at once that your jewel was a pearl beyond price. I made up my mind that I would possess it. Audacity has won. It is mine.”

“Do you mean to say that Miss White has accepted you?” she asked.

“Miss White,” I answered, “leaves De Vorseau for New York tomorrow morning. I follow her in the afternoon. The next day we are to be married.”

Mrs. Bright sat down suddenly.

“For the first time in twenty years,” she said, “I am surprised.

“When do you return?” she asked, in a moment.

“Never.”

“You have no fears?”

“None.”

“It is said that Miss White’s former husband is a desperate creature, and quite capable of killing any man who dares to marry her.”

“I am not afraid of him,” I said, looking very fierce.

“Will you take me back to the drawingroom now?” she said rising.

Later in the evening, just after I had bade Mrs. Lemonde good night

and whispered "until tomorrow" in Clara's ear, Mrs. Bright again approached me.

"I will bid you good by," she said, "in case I do not see you again, but remember you will always be eligibles. I expect to see you here again."

But she never has.

BY MY VALOR.

'Twas at the season's brightest ball,
With costumes rich and gay with dancing;
Miss Kate outshone the maidens all
In something Turkish and entrancing.

My trappings, too, were of the east—
A sort of oriental medley
Of turban, brecks, and—not the least—
A scimitar of aspect deadly.

She must have known how in my heart
I longed to vault the bars between us,
Yet—proper one!—her formal part
Was played as though all men had seen us.

At length, as—even *Mistering* me—
She asked to take my weapon trusty;
"Come, draw that queer old thing," said she,
And gently touched the scabbard rusty.

And, never handy with the blade,
But all too glad of slightest labor
For her sweet sake, I straight essayed
With valiant mien to bare the saber.

It would not come! I tugged and strained
Choked expletives within me burning;
True to its sheath the steel remained;
But long the lane without a turning!

At last it budged—another jerk—
Success! And with it pride exceeding;
But, bless me, what a piece of work!
How could I hide my finger's bleeding?
"Oh, Jack, you've cut yourself!" she cried.
From her?—my name—without a handle!
A blush—self mastery—naught beside—
But, blade, our game was worth the candle.

Yes, later, Kate let slip the chance
To say she'd always be my sister;
Still just as sweet at home and dance
She now calls other fellows *Mister*.

M. A. De Wolfe Howe, Jr.

A FAIR SLAVE TO THE MAHDI.*

BY CHARLES EDWARD BARNES.

A tale of strange happenings in the Soudan—The “angel of light” who came in mysterious fashion to the Mahdi’s camp at Khartoum, and the thrilling adventures that befell her in the strife for freedom.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—THE REFUGEES FACE THEIR WATERLOO.

FROM the moment Bardoff and Dorothy fell into the clutches of the enemy, they had at least no occasion to long for a break in the dread monotony of their lone march. Then, too, the maddening suspense was at last ended, albeit with the clash of arms and the realization of captivity. However, though they were being borne forward to the tribunal of final judgment—their execution ground or their place of deliverance—they could not forget that just beyond that deadly demarcation stood hope with outstretched arms and a welcome such as is accorded few in any pass of human affairs. With each camp encountered and an emir faced, the prince gave his timeworn history in a few convincing phrases, which by now he had almost taught himself to believe were true. The guards, who at first had taken him prisoner, he now regarded in the light of pilots; and so persuasive was he in his argument, so suave and devout in his assumed devotion to the Mahdi, that these simple warriors began to feel proud to be the custodians as well as the guides of so distinguished an emissary.

On the dreary route toward the sea he regaled his guards with thrilling stories of the brave deeds of the Mahdi, of the victory that was surely his. He dipped into fiction, keeping the men in good humor with tales of frolic and fighting, astonishing them by making them each a present of two gold pieces, which, as he explained, were souvenirs of Gordon, and part of the government treasure from the palace at Khartoum.

When halts were made for water or food, it was the prince who showed the greatest desire to press forward, even prodding his keepers to hurry on to the noble commander, Osman Digna, for whom he had such astounding tidings, and such a precious gift. The guards even left him more than once to bring him fresh milk and fruit. Finding him always awaiting them on their return, they no longer regarded him as their captive, but as their comrade, pleased that fate had singled them out to be the guides and attendants of so illustrious a commissioner.

During these moments, when Dorothy and the prince were left alone, they huddled their camels together and discussed the gravity of the situation.

“I have these fellows perfectly in my control,” explained Bardoff.

*This story began in the June issue of *THE ARGOSY*. The seven back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 70 cents.

"There is no longer any doubt in their minds but that I am the Mahdi's representative, and they are flattered with the honor of piloting us to Osman Digna. But there is a desperate predicament before us. I have told them that I go to give the commander important tidings from Khartoum, and to deliver you, the fair slave of the Mahdi, to the dervish dignitary. The difficulty is here; though while trying my best to arrive at the front, it is patent that we must never reach Osman Digna, or it will be all over with us. I can deceive a few provincial emirs, but a man of Digna's caliber would never fall prey to my clumsy machinations. He's too wise."

"Pray, then, why are you advancing so fast if there is such a grave peril before us?" asked Dorothy.

"Simply to get nearer the English lines; and if possible, to be taken prisoner by them. Of course, it is a dangerous and desperate thing to do, but nothing else remains for us—nothing except for me to plunge into the valley of death, for you the little poisoned dagger. Do you understand me, comrade?"

"I understand," Dorothy nodded.

It seemed almost cruel that while she could hear the long roll of the English cannonading, such a somber expedient should be forced into her pleasant perspective. Would such indeed be the end of all this mighty struggle toward freedom? God forbid!

As they neared the scene of conflict the emirs became less inquisitive, the people less interested in the strange captives, and even the guards themselves half forgot their charges in a contemplation of the scene of action from some bald height. They grew grave and stopped their chatter, for they had friends in the thick of battle, and their faith was at stake with the infidel giaour.

Toward evening the roar of battle melted away; and then the vast native hordes relinquished the field of carnage and crawled back.

Shrieking, dancing, laughing like fiends, shouting, "Long live the Mahdi" and "Death to the white infidels!" they resembled a vast army of demons climbing out of the bottomless pit. Some still bore arms, some the flags of the emirs, and a few carried banners upon which were quotations from the Koran, or such mottoes as, "Whosoever fights under this banner shall surely be victorious!"

But for all their mad delight, for all their drunkenness of victory, their boasting, their threats, it could be plainly seen by calm observers that the forces of the Ansar had received a tremendous whipping.

Because the English had reined in their men at nightfall, because they had ceased firing and retreated to more favorable ground for the building of the *zerebas* for bivouac, the dervishes accounted it as a great conquest for God and the Mahdi. A force of the Ansar must be attacked, driven back, crushed to earth, and utterly annihilated in order to get them to concede a victory to the enemy. A single man escaping can throw his hands to heaven in triumph and shout: "We've won, we've won!" and thousands will join in the feast of praise and gratitude.

Seeing that it was quite impossible to hold the Ansar in check till morning, and not wishing them to lose their enthusiasm, Osman Digna and his council sent abroad the command that the several detachments were to hold

themselves in readiness to make a night attack upon the enemy. This order was received with shouts of acclaim, and seemed to pacify the battle-maddened hosts for the time being.

Over the plains and ridges the campfires were burning, and supper was being prepared. Out came the stars one by one. Only the heights were distinguishable, the lower spaces cloaked by the shadows of evening. The drums beat on, the horns echoed down the vast spaces, the neighing of horses and the moaning of camels kept up a constant disturbance, and under ten thousand tents the dervishes refreshed themselves for the mighty matter in hand.

While the riot of the returned Ansar was going on, it was useless for the guards to progress with Dorothy and the prince. They contented themselves with waiting until the tumult subsided.

After making many inquiries the camp of the commander, Osman Digna, was located. In that direction the little caravan at once proceeded, Dorothy very nervous and Bardoff clutching his sword beneath his glibbeh, deep in thought. They were nearing the verge of their precipice.

Sometimes the problem seemed too great for the worn and overwhelmed soldier. He dared not refuse to accompany the guards, yet he dared not attempt to bribe them for fear that in the religious enthusiasm of the hour, they would refuse the bribe and turn their charges over to the fanatics to be torn to pieces.

Of course, to accompany the guards into the presence of the chief dignitary himself was like stepping up to the cannon's muzzle. It meant sure and instant death.

They neared the commander's camp. Before it, seated in an open space, was the council, in constant communion over the gravity of the situation. Grave and solemn these men of action sat about on small skin rugs before the commander's camp, stroking their black beards and surveying the tragic field before them.

The prince surveyed the group from a little distance. "We have come to the brink of eternity," he whispered tremulously to Dorothy. "For the first time in my life I am completely at a standstill. I don't know what to do—I don't know which way to turn, and I can't lie with looks or lips any longer. It has been the most terrible day of my life. We have run right into the lion's jaws, comrade. My heart is dead, my soul crushed, my mind blank, and it is the end of all. God help you, poor comrade; I cannot!"

Bending down upon his camel's neck, the strong man shook like a reed, until his fair companion thrust out her hand and seized him with a cold grip of steel.

"Don't give up," she whispered. "Let us rally once more—and then, if Heaven denies us hope, God's will be done. I shall go down like the martyrs of old, nor be ashamed nor afraid."

The prince straightened and turned. That voice thrilled him. It seemed supernatural. Through the rift in the cloak that sheltered and concealed the fair face, Bardoff caught the gleam of that calm, heroic glance. Seizing her hand he was about to utter his resolve to make one more desperate rally,

when one of their guard suddenly returned. He had climbed up the slight acclivity to tell the commander of his strange guest from far Khartoum.

Bardoff faced him with a feeling that the next word would be a command to appear before the tribunal of death; when, glancing up the knoll he saw a bloodstained sheik groveling before the commander, evidently imparting some very wonderful news.

"We shall be compelled to wait," said the guard, to which words the prince gave a groan, albeit of gratitude. "A spy has just arrived from the English ranks. He brings the astonishing tidings that the Mahdi is dead—that he was poisoned——"

"What!" cried Bardoff, feigning amazement and grief. "the Mahdi dead?——"

"A message was received from some Russian prince who escaped from Khartoum, and who is now in hiding in the Kohreb range."

Bardoff reached over and seized Dorothy's hand.

"What does it all mean?" she whispered in despair.

"Hope, comrade, it means hope," was the answer.

"Thank God, thank God!" was the prayerful whisper.

"Our messages have been received by the English——"

"What! those sent by the vultures?"

"Yes. It is all a miracle—I cannot believe it. That man you see there gesticulating before the commander is a spy escaped from the British lines. He brings the news. The Mahdi's death appalls them. They are simply dumfounded. Look at them!"

"But what is to be done? How shall that serve us?" was the bitter query.

"Wait, we shall see. It means delay, and happily delay means darkness, and darkness flight."

"I am ready," murmured Dorothy. "Lead and I follow."

For a moment there were no words between them. One by one the fires were extinguished according to orders. Then in the solemn night the silent Ansar armed themselves to the teeth and took up their stand in the ranks, ready to dash down into the English camp.

Half fearing, yet more than half believing the staggering tidings which had come by such a roundabout way into the camp of the Ansar, the council in state resolved to hurry the dervishes into the field, doubtful what effect upon the popular mind the tidings of the Mahdi's passing might have.

At last the signal came, and the solid column began to move. Here and there the flat flanges of a dervish spear gave forth a gleam, and the white flanks of an Arab steed shone through the rift. Everything depended upon taking the enemy by surprise; so the native host moved onward in silence.

Suddenly from far over the sand dunes toward the sea there shot a beam of vivid white light. It was the searchlight of a gunboat in the harbor of Suakim. Instantly the mighty host was bathed in a flood of pale sunshine. The silent concourse seemed to have been lifted out of the plain by the transfiguring beams—to float onward in midair, their swarthy forms in strong silhouette to the watchers from behind. Still the Ansar were undismayed by this wonder.

Dorothy clutched the hand of her companion, drawing a deep breath before the wonderful enchantment; and before he could return that pressure, two tongues of flame burst from the very heart of the overlooking crag opposite them; and two crimson balls of fire were projected over the plain, until they exploded like double stars over the dervishes, scattering a shower of deadly scrapnal and plowing a hole in the ranks of the Ansar. Then the pandemonium of battle broke loose.

Two more searchlights stretched their funnel shapes over the wilderness and seemed to tangle up the astonished dervishes in their ghostly beams, till all the white plain resembled a tempest whipped sea, wherein a myriad souls were struggling in a mighty turmoil, and swept forward by an irresistible tide.

Suddenly Bardoff turned to his dumfounded guard. "Go tell the commander, the noble Osman Digna, that I must see him at once. Tell him that I bear precious tidings from far Khartoum——"

"It is useless now," said the guard testily. "Can you not see that the battle is on?"

"But I cannot delay longer—I dare not." With a great show of impatience the prince thrust his hand into his gibbeh and brought forth a handful of gold pieces. "Go, in the name of Allah and the Mahdi; tell him that I await his call."

The man drew a breath of astonishment, gave the prince's haggard face a quick glance, clutched the coins greedily and was away. The other guard noted the transaction, and showed signs of rising jealousy.

"And you," broke in the prince, diving again into his gibbeh, and bringing forth another handful of coin, "go and bring me a drink of water from the wells, that I may be fresh and full of speech when I stand before the commander, and Allah be with you!"

The guard, who had done many such errands for his captive before, did not think for a moment but that he might do likewise with safety again. He folded his two hands about the coins, buried them in his bosom and started off at full speed.

"Come!" cried Bardoff hoarsely to his comrade. "Our time is at hand."

"What do you mean?" asked Dorothy.

"To the lines—to the English. God alone knows how, but follow me"

The prince and his charge were soon swallowed up in the mass of tents. Dorothy reached out and seized her protector's girdle with the grip of death.

"We shall have five minutes—perhaps ten—the start of them; and even then their search will be a hard one. Night is deepening. Don't be afraid, comrade. Take hope!"

"I fear nothing," came the answer. "Faster—faster. I can cling to you."

Straight to the rear of the vast encampment they ran for some distance, then made a sweeping northerly detour; the two came out a half mile above the camp of the commander. Then facing the east and freedom, they plunged down into the midst of battle, resolved to reach the English lines or perish in the effort.

Thicker and faster now the cannons along the ridges threw fire and devastation into the dervish ranks. Across the *chor* the battery of Gardner guns poured a cataract of cross fire. The two fugitives dashed forward in the darkness. Bardoff clutched in one hand a white rag, which he intended at the right moment to wave to the English if that moment ever came. In the other he held his sword, resolved to cut down the first man who stayed them on their fight of life and death.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—ON THE THRESHOLD OF FREEDOM.

SUDDENLY Bardoff felt a clutch upon his shoulder and a backward lurch, which all but snatched him from his feet. Turning, he was amazed to confront the very guard whom he had sent to interview the commander, Osman Digna.

There was a look of keen triumph upon the fellow's swarthy visage.

"Dog of a Russian infidel," he cried, "the messengers have arrived from the emir, Mamud el Fiki. Your time has come. The grand commander wants you. He has ordered us to bring you, dead or alive. Which shall it be?"

Bardoff had swung loose from Dorothy and drawn his sword with a backward movement, which the guard did not see. The latter was about to shout to the other pursuers when a swift lunge broke the cry into something like the yelp of a jackal. The man had apparently dodged the blow, for the blade grazed his straw cap as he dropped, and all but wrenched the prince's arm from the socket; but in the ankle deep sand he lay perfectly still.

In the tempest of battle Bardoff bent and saw that the man's neck had been partially torn away by an explosive bullet. He seized Dorothy's hand, and on they ran, till finally they gained the north flank of the field, their other pursuers having sped by them like a whirlwind.

They both suddenly stumbled in the dark over a dead camel, and Dorothy crouched close to the still warm body to keep from being trodden or run down by the cavalry coming up in the rear. She put forth her hand and seized that of her comrade. It was strangely cold. Then she bent over him and spoke, but there came no answer. Her heart stopped beating for an instant. Things blurred and danced before her eyes. Creeping closer to her fallen comrade, she managed to turn his face so that she could look into it; and when she did, she bowed down and rested her own against it. Dead? He was dead!

For a long time she lay with her face against her comrade's, unable to stir. Then she arose. "Dead!" she whispered, but the voice seemed not her own.

She forgot liberty, the English lines, the shrieking dervishes, everything. She thought only of him—her friend, her rescuer, her hero.

She looked up. A shell plowed up the ridge and all but buried them both in a deluge of sand. She struggled but sank back. She wanted to get into the range of the bullets—to invite them, beckon them. Her strength was gone.

Another battery was hurrying by from the rear, the nearest gun drawn by

four camels. In her frenzy Dorothy even tried to throw herself in their way, but only succeeded in thrusting out her white hand where the wheels of the gun carriage ran over it and crushed it into the sand.

She rose and looked at the bruised member. She felt no pain as yet. Then she thought of the dagger—the poisoned dagger, and a frenzied laugh escaped her. She seized it with her left hand, gave herself a blow, and fell with her face in the sand prostrate over her comrade's body.

The sudden weight thrown upon him, seemed to rouse the prince, who had fallen into a sort of trance of exhaustion. He writhed and twisted till he sat erect, with the limp body of Dorothy across his knees. For a moment he did not realize what had happened; then he seized the frail form, drew it to him, and looked into the pale face.

What had happened? Shot—killed? He thrust his hand into her bosom, moaning, "Dorothy, Dorothy!" He felt the faint flutter of her heart. Then there seemed to gather within him a sudden and a gigantic courage—a supernatural strength from some miraculous source. Throwing his arms about the lithe form, he was about to raise it, when something slipped from her bosom and fell. The prince gave a gasp and stooped to pick it up, his soul on fire with wonder. Then he gave a wild cry. It was the dagger.

For a moment Bardoff felt a sense of frightful suffocation, as if the sepulcher were closing over him. Then that nameless despair gave way to a hopeless, heedless resolve. He would take her in his arms and push on.

Rising, he gathered poor Dorothy to his bosom again, and began running.

Every now and then the mad refugee would see something indistinguishable that blocked his way, would strike at it viciously, and then plunge forward like a tempest. He ran down a short ravine, whose bottom was filled with corpses. Over them he raced. Up on the other side, panting, staggering, half dead; and suddenly he confronted a solid square of blazing musketry before and above him. The bullets swept over his head like a whirlwind, and he stooped low.

All at once he was overhauled by a dervish, whom, on turning, he ran through like a shot, leaving his sword in the fallen body. Then he raised his hand to the square of soldiers. There was a shrill shout from somewhere, and then this firing, almost full in his face, ceased. With wild shrieks the dervishes were plunging down into the ravine back of him. A moment more and they would be upon him.

At the same time another order came from the hollow of the square, and three hundred Britishers charged like mad toward the staggering figure with its limp burden.

"My God! It's the prince—it's the prince and the 'angel of light.' Save them, save them!"

"The prince—the prince!" ran through the throng.

"Lie down!" shouted the forward man. "Down, down!"

Bardoff obeyed. Then came another whirlwind of bullets over his head, answered by a shower of lances from the howling Ansar.

The regiment flew by, forming a protecting wedge behind him, pouring volley after volley into the groaning, struggling native horde.

Bardoff arose, shouldered his burden, and staggered on toward the haven of refuge. He saw nothing but the yellow lights of the hospital corps in the centre of the stockade. When he was recognized in the somber light, a shout went up that shook the earth like a volcano, but the prince scarcely heard it.

He kept on till he reached the hospital corps, where he fell all in a heap among the wounded in the center of the camp.

"Save her!" he moaned. "For God's sake, save her."

The man with his sleeves rolled up dropped by the frail figure in the sand and glanced into her face. "Save her?" he answered scornfully. "Why, man, she's dead!"

"Dead, you say?—dead?" the Russian gasped hoarsely.

The surgeon did not answer. He was tearing the gibbeh from Dorothy's neck and bosom.

Bardoff misinterpreted his silence, and snatched up a revolver. He put the muzzle against his heart.

"Seize that man! He's killing himself!" shouted an officer. Some one dashed the weapon from Bardoff's weak hand just as it exploded. The bullet grazed the flesh. Then, utterly exhausted, he rolled over and was still.

The semicircle about them was in a wild uproar. The routing of the dervishes was forgotten.

"Cameron—ho, Cameron!" called out a surgeon. "For the love of God, what kind of a wound is this?" He was examining an elongated scratch, much inflamed and swollen, under the right shoulder blade of the frail feminine form on the warm sand.

The expert surgeon dashed over, falling by the still form. "Why, she's dead, isn't she?" he said testily.

"No," said the other. "There is heart action yet; but it's weak—mighty weak."

The expert was examining the wound with critical care. "Lights!" he cried. "It's from a poisoned dagger," he said. "Treat with strong antiseptic, then bromides and brandy. Get her drunk—artificial respiration—everything. God knows you'll have to be mighty quick about it. She won't last much longer."

It was the gray of the morning when Dorothy opened her eyes and stared about her. "Where is he?" she gasped. "Where?"

"Who?" asked a kindly voice.

"The prince—my poor comrade? You left him there—dead, on the field?"

"Calm yourself," was the quiet reply. "There he is—in the cot. He hasn't come to yet."

"Then he lives—he lives! Tell me that."

The young surgeon nodded.

Dorothy murmured something, then lay back upon her pillow.

CHAPTER XXXV.—BY WAY OF CONTRAST.

ON the deck of the hospital ship off Quarantine Island in the bay of Suakim some weeks after the riotous events of the last chapter, a fair young con-

valescent was reclining in a broad wicker chair, gazing over the placid waters.

To an artist's eye it was not a scene of picturesque enchantment, to the poet unsuggestive of sublime flights; but to the glad heart of the pale faced woman it was sweet beyond compare. Over the bleak volcanic ridges to the westward no longer rolled the somber echoes of battle. Up from the lowlands trembled the weird song of the camel boy or the call of the muezzin from his tower, a sepia silhouette against the faint purple of the tropic clouds.

"Yes," murmured the favored child of destiny. "God is good, God is great!" Then she fell to dreaming of the miracle of her deliverance from the valley of death, and her restoration to health again.

Relapsing into a half doze of perfect content, Dorothy idly watched through her closing lids the flying fish. Then there was a familiar stir beside her—a presence she had learned to divine.

"What! awake?" said the newcomer softly as the wan face turned and gave him a smile of welcome. "You were lying so still, I thought you were sleeping."

"Only dreaming," she murmured. Then, as her soft eyes met his, she added. "And you bring good news—I can see that. Tell me."

Bardoff smiled. "You women are a mystery," he said, gathering closer and drawing forth a sheet of blue paper. "You divine things by intuition. Now, I doubt not that you know the contents of this telegram without my reading it to you."

The convalescent started. "I do not read so deeply as that; but from your face, prince, I gather that it is nothing evil."

"Your brother is on his way here from Suez. He will be here within a week."

The fair listener drew a deep breath and reached forth her hand to clasp the sweet message. "My dear brother, my Tom, is coming!" she exclaimed. "Heaven be praised! You make me well already."

"It is all very wonderful," resumed the prince, glancing at the telegram. "I obtained the facts through the official departments. It seems that your brother arrived at Cairo some weeks since and tried to get permission to go up the Nile in his steam yacht. The authorities thought him mad till they discovered his reason. He offered to transport a whole garrison as escort at his own expense, feeling confident that you must have reached the upper Nile valley in the balloon, and that somehow he would find you dead or alive. He vowed that he would never go back to America without knowing your fate, and was actually preparing to run the gantlet, against the advice and commands of the Egyptian government when the message by the vulture reached the forces at Otao. It was telegraphed to him by the American consul at Cairo.

"He thinks you are too ill to receive or send messages, so he has found out your whereabouts and your condition through the department. At every station possible on the route he has stopped and asked for information by wire from Suakim. He seems perfectly frantic with joy and haste to reach you. He is certainly a jewel of a brother."

"Ah, poor boy!" Dorothy had been drinking in these tidings with eagerness. "Poor, dear Tom. Oh, you must meet him, you must know him, brave friend. He will take you to his heart and bless you for all your courage and battles for my sake; and that moment will be the proudest, happiest of our lives. Will it not, comrade?"

For the moment the prince was silent. "It will be a sweet moment," he said softly, "yet a sad one, my little heroine. I welcome it, yet I fear it."

Dorothy opened her eyes. "Something troubles you," she said.

The prince bowed humbly.

"Tell me then," she persisted. "Come; make it all plain to me."

Bardoff drew a deep breath, then produced a letter. "I have had tidings," he said.

"And they are ill tidings," she broke in; "and while mine were sweet and you shared them, now that yours are bitter, let me share yours likewise."

"Thank you," said the prince gratefully. "But in order to understand it all, it is necessary that I explain matters which may seem inexplicable to you. I am a Russian; you are an American. Our traditions, our governmental principles, and our very rules of action lie far apart. You must know that for years I have trodden upon the thin ice of diplomatic service, giving up my young life to the cause, only to be rewarded with ingratitude—nay, even hatred, slander and conspiracy."

The silent girl respected the calm, low spoken words; then, after a pause, she said: "And this letter—these tidings bring to you a knowledge of this truth?"

"They confirm my long suspicions. This letter is from my mother. Shall I read it—translate it for you. But no; you would not understand. It would only mystify and alarm you. I can only say that while you are welcomed back to civilization by your good brother, friends and even the remotest strangers of your wonderful land, who know your history, I dare not return to the country of my birth and childhood. I am as one dead; and my return would only mean my death at the hands of my enemies. Does that seem wonderful to you?"

"I cannot understand it," said Dorothy in alarm.

"Nevertheless, it is true. For no fault of mine I am an outcast—a wanderer upon the face of the earth. I was sent to Khartoum to be killed. When all others had given to them the privilege of fleeing and saving themselves, I alone of the consular staff was commanded to remain. When Khartoum fell, and it was known that not a soul escaped, there was great rejoicing among those who had brought about my incarceration there; and now there is gloom and rage and enmity, instead of a greeting from my fatherland. No one waits for me with longing. My mother will meet me in Cairo as soon as I am able to move from here; and then——"

"And then?" echoed Dorothy breathlessly.

"I don't know. You see, it is a very long story, with its roots buried in history previous to my birth. Feuds and enmities survive in my country for generations oftentimes. My father was a very ambitious man—one who dared to love a pure and noble soul, whose misfortune was to have been born far

above him in social distinction, but one who loved him devoutly, nevertheless. My father was a petty officer in one of the provincial regiments, and she who became my mother was the daughter of his superior. These matters are very serious in Russia; and when the Crimean War broke out, the superior officer went up higher in the ranks, even in the shadow of the great Czar himself, while his unworthy son in law was all but disgraced.

"During the Crimean campaign my poor mother nearly starved to death right at her father's own doorstep, fed through the bounty of some of the household servants, who risked their own lives in this charity; and then came the tidings to her ears that her husband was to be pushed into the van of the fighting ranks by the Czar's orders; and if he escaped death by some miracle, he was, on some pretext or other, to be transported for life to Siberia.

"Oh, you cannot understand these things as they were—aye, as they still are—in my country. But writing a farewell letter to the heart broken woman of his love, seeing defeat alike in death and survival, knowing that with his passing his widow would be taken back into the paternal arms and at least saved a pauper's destiny, the brave man plunged into the thick of the fight during the dock explosions of Sebastopol, and my poor father was killed, and what is more, we have no record of the finding of his body and its decent burial."

"He is dead then?" murmured Dorothy, her soul harrowed by the remembrance of that strange parting moment in the monastery of St. Antony of the Desert, overlooking the sweeping Nile; "he is dead then—you are quite sure?"

"Of that, God alone knows the truth. As for the living—the surviving mother and child—for all these years she has remained true to his memory, refusing many worthy hands, devoting herself to her son. Then I was drawn into diplomatic service, where those who had borne enmity toward the father might continue to persecute the son. I was sent into the heart of Africa to die; but I still live, with no one to glory in the truth save her alone—my poor mother."

Dorothy seemed stunned by the picture so vividly thrown up before her. But when the story was ended, she put forth her hand, seizing his with a trembling encouragement.

"Don't say that, comrade," she said smiling, "for it is not true."

Then, after a moment: "Do you know I had a visitor last night. Can you guess? Well, he was the young surgeon of the field corps who brought me back to life in the camp at Otao. He told me some things which amazed me, yet made me somehow very grateful. Shall I tell you just one episode as he confessed it?"

The prince was silent.

"Of course, from the moment that I believed you dead on the field," began Dorothy, "and I resorted to that last expedient in the madness of despair, I knew nothing till I awoke in the hospital camp with the workers still fighting back that death which I had coveted, and which was creeping inch by inch upon me. But last night I learned, comrade, how my rescuer bore me on his shoulders through the Arab ranks under terrific fire with the

pursuers at his heels ; how he broke through the dervish lines and swept over the valley of death, and finally reached the shelter of the square in the nick of time. Yes, he told me how this brave comrade, believing me dead, rather than part from me after the mighty struggle to the threshold of salvation, chose to follow me, whither he thought I had preceded him, and was prevented at the very brink of eternity."

She paused, looking intently at her companion.

"Let me ask you now, my friend," she went on, "having brought me from the wilderness so far toward my home, is it not meet that this faithful one should accompany me the rest of the way? Since he was willing to die for my sake, is it presuming now to ask him to live for it?"

Bardoff trembled. A vague fear was in his heart—a terror greater than any inspired by dervish foe.

"Comrade," he said, like a penitent before a shrine, "believe me when I confess to you that day and night since our rescue from the vale of death, I have been harrowed with the thought of parting. Miserable as I was in the bitter struggle, it was happiness indeed compared with the agony which I knew would be my fate a little time hence ; and unworthy as the thought was, dare I confess, I often wished us back there just for a little time that I might fight on through just one more battle for your dear sake. There was courage in my heart to ask you if I might fight it on through years and through life to the very close. But with the receipt of these tidings, comrade, my bravery melted away, and despair came. For what had a penniless outcast, without home and country, to offer in return for this great privilege——"

"Yourself, no more, my hero." The interruption was passionate, strong, and sincere. "The 'penniless outcast' saved my life and brought me in his strong arms here to the very threshold of a new struggle, and he must not desert me now. My home shall be his home, my country his country. Brave friend, for these many weeks we have shared every adversity, because we come now within the pale of civilization again, let us not dissemble, for reservations are unworthy us. Let us be open and frank and speak from the heart. Will you go on with me, comrade, on to the end, through all the life-long struggle?"

The prince reached forth and seized the thin hand. He bent and kissed it reverently.

"Ah, God knows, my darling, you have asked the very sweet question I should never have dared ask you. But if, knowing all, trusting all, taking my pledge of faith and love and devotion, I may be your comrade still, Heaven bless you, I follow gladly whithersoever fate and you shall lead me."

"Thank you," was the tender response. "Thank you, and God keep you always. Leave me now, comrade, and let me lie here and dream for a little time. But fear not, brave heart, for all shall be well."

Too full in spirit to more than murmur a gentle blessing, the prince pressed the thin hand once more to his lips, gave and received a look which only they who love and are loved can understand ; then moved silently away like one who has conquered the world.

LIZ BASCOM'S REVENGE.

BY REDFIELD CLARKE.

The faithlessness of a moonshiner turns love to hate—Treachery—A good fight and its dire results.

“THERE, there, Liz, don't go on that a way; I've tole ye fifty times a'ready, an' I tell ye once mo' that I mean to do whut's squar' an' right.”

“I know ye've told me that a good many times, Jeth, an' that's jes' why my heart's a-breakin' now. Whin ye tole me fust, I b'lieved ye, but now it 'pears like ye tell me thet jes' to put me off an' don' low to eveh be no mo' to me 'n whut ye be.”

“Well, Liz, if thet's how ye feel 'bout it, I reckon we's might's well quit right now. I don't want no wife thet cain't take my word.”

“Thet's what I reckoned ye'd say, Jeth Baxter; thet's what I knowed ye'd say. Do you think I'm blin' an' cain't see whut other folks sees? If I couldn't see it m'self, there's 'nough to tell me.

“I know ye're in love with that yaller haired Oaks gal. I know ye go to see her eveh' night ye kin leave the 'still,' an' I know as soon as ye git whut money ye want, ye 'low to leave these mountains an' take her with ye.”

The girl's voice, at first low and pleading, broken with sobs, had gradually grown clear and intense as her great wrongs rose up before her, causing her for the moment to forget sorrow, shame, and even her love for the man for whom she had sinned, and who now stood frowning before her.

She paused a moment, panting, expectant; and the man spoke. His voice was cold and his lip was curled by a sneering smile.

“Well, mebbe I am goin' to light out when I git good 'n' ready, an' mebbe Sue Oaks is goin' 'long, but when she goes, she'll go as my *wife*, an' not as you'd be willin' to go.”

If he had looked at the girl standing close beside him, Jeth Baxter, reckless fellow though he was, would have said something to placate, rather than rouse, the demon surging in that passionate breast.

Liz strove to speak, but for a moment the words seemed to stick in her throat and strangle her. When at last she had recovered her self control, she spoke in the same low, intense tone as before, and only the rapidity of her words and the quick gasping for breath betrayed the wild tumult within.

“She'll go as your wife an' not as I'd be willin' to go, eh? An' why would I be willin' to go any otheh way? Why, but to hide my disgrace, to keep the folks heah in these yer' mountains thet hev' knowed me frum a little chile, to keep 'em frum findin' out whut I've come to through love fo' you?

“No, Jeth Baxter, you an' Sue Oaks won't leave these mountains together—neveh, neveh, neveh! Theh wuz a time when you could hev' lef' me fur anotheh an' I wouldn't 'a' said a word ef it hed 'a' killed me, but that time is

past. I've got more'n my life or your'n to think of now, an' Jeth Baxter, I say agin—an' sw'ar it—you don' leave me for Sue Oaks or no otheh woman as long as I live."

The man stood for a moment looking down and grinding his heel into the mossy sod. At last, shrugging his shoulders, he broke the silence.

"I ain't neveh bin afeared of any man thet walked, an' I don't 'low to be skeered by a woman now. If this is the end of it, good night," and he strode off up the mountain side.

The girl stood motionless looking in the direction he had taken, and the evening glow revealed a look of wild, tender yearning which showed that, even now, her woman's love was gaining a victory over her woman's hate. At last her despair and misery swept over her like a great overwhelming wave, and she sank to the ground moaning.

For a few moments she crouched there in the darkness, going over and over each pleasant incident in her life with which Jeth Baxter was connected.

She recalled her suffering on that day, a few weeks before, when it had first flashed upon her that Jeth was growing indifferent, then the feelings of wild jealousy and despair when it began to be whispered in her ears that he had transferred his affections to Sue Oaks. Sue Oaks!

At the thought of that name all the hate and malice of her wild nature came to the surface. Had she been weak enough to wish this man would return that she might beg his forgiveness? That she might crouch at his feet and beg him to forget the harsh threats of a few minutes before? No! a thousand times, no!

She hated him for loving another, she hated that other for being loved by him, and, when she recalled his indifference to her suffering and tears, and thought how he would leave her there to be shunned by all, to be the jest of rough men and the scorn of heartless women, her longing for revenge seemed to swallow up every other desire. She only knew that she hated as fiercely as she had loved, and prayed more fervently for revenge than she had ever prayed for forgiveness.

"Oh, if I could kill 'em both!" she hissed. "If I could kill 'em both; her first, an' him next!"

She was startled by the sharp click of a horse's hoofs on the rocky road. As the horse and rider came under the tree where she was crouching, she rose up so suddenly that the animal snorted and shied and the man's hand instinctively sought his revolver.

"Is that you, Mr. Brainard?" said the girl.

"Yes; and is that you, Miss Bascom?" was the reply.

"Yes; an' I want to talk to you a minute."

"All right, as long as you like;" and Brainard dismounted and stood beside her.

"Are you one o' them guv'ment men?" asked the girl abruptly.

"One of them what?" he cried, considerably taken aback. A question of that nature addressed to him by a woman whom he more than half suspected of being in love with a moonshiner was not, to say the least, reassuring, in a country where the mere suspicion of a man's being a government detective

was considered a sufficient reason for putting him out of the way at the first opportunity.

"Well, you needn't say yes or no," the girl went on, "but I b'lieve ye be, an' I'm goin' to tell ye something thet you've been tryin' weeks to fin' out.

"I know you 'low you're here to buy timber land, an' you've made 'em all think so, even paw, but when a woman's in love she sees a heap mo'n otheh folks, an' the man I loved keeps a 'still' right up in yondeh mountain."

"The man you loved? Don't you love him now?"

"No, I hate him!" and her white teeth flashed in the faint moonlight.

"You don't need to know why; but I do hate him, an' I want him to know thet I kin hate as well as I kin love. His 'still' is up in Wil' Cat gulch, an' whar you'd neveh find it 'less'n some un tole ye the way."

She kept on rapidly, as if fearing to pause lest her courage should fail her. "To git to the 'still,' ye go right up thet road till ye come to the big gray rock jes' at the edge of the bluff.

"If ye pull away the bushes at the foot ye'll see a narreh path thet runs down into the gully, jes' 'cross the dry run. Then climb the rocks on yon side. When ye git to the top, keep right on west, till ye come to a little clearin'; jis' beyond thet ye come to the edge of Wil' Cat.

"Yo' all 'ull hev to be mighty keerful climbin' down the rocks there, fur it's hard climbin' in the dark, an' a right smart drop. 'Bout a mile up the gulch ye'll come to the falls; ye kin git acrost below the falls where the water is shaller, and right above 'em, on the far side, back among the big trees an' close to the steep side of the mountain, ye'll find the 'still.' When ye git 'bove the falls yo' all want to keep mighty quiet, foh some un is sure to be a watchin' out."

At this the girl paused, panting, and leaned her body against the tree as if exhausted. Although this was the very information he had been striving for weeks to secure, Jim Brainard was too old a bird to give his hand away at once.

So he said, in the most surprised manner he could assume: "Why, Miss Bascom, you astonish me. Of course I knew there were moonshiners in this part of the country, but little thought I was so near them.

"I must tell you also that you are much mistaken in me, but I shall not take advantage of your confidence by repeating the story you have just told me. I would advise you to say no more about it. Go home now, like a good girl and get some rest; you are excited. Good night!" And he remounted his horse and rode on.

Brainard had a double purpose in assuming an air of innocence. First, that Liz Bascom might not feel sure of him, and should hesitate about informing her lover of what she had done, in case she should repent.

On the other hand, if it were a clever trap to catch him (which he doubted), he knew the nature of his game too well to think he would be allowed to continue his ride far down that road after the admission was made.

Being a man of much nerve and long experience, Brainard's plans were quickly formed. Having represented himself as a "land looker" representing an Eastern syndicate, when he arrived at Dallas, the county seat, he had

taken up his temporary residence with Major Bascom, Liz's father, an extensive holder of timber land, and a man of influence in Pike County.

Brainard was well posted as to the value and quality of pine lands, and had conducted his prospecting in such a business-like manner that, with the exception of Liz, not one in the community had suspected him.

His associates had dropped into Dallas and the surrounding country one at a time, and in such natural and unassuming ways that he had a posse of his own, small in numbers, but quite sufficient to cope with any gang of moonshiners with which he was likely to come in contact.

In his long tramps over the mountains he had stumbled across several signs, unmistakable to his experienced eye of an illicit "still," but try as he would, he could not locate it. Now it was as plain as day to him.

Though not aware of the secret paths described by Liz, he had reached most of the spots she had mentioned, by more rugged routes. He had discovered piles of faggots on different lofty peaks which could be kindled at a moment's notice and flash their warnings of danger from mountain to canyon until every moonshiner in the district was aroused. These had been left just as he had found them, for it was his business to see that they were not lighted, rather than to excite suspicion by destroying them.

Brainard rode on down to Major Bascom's house, put his horse in the stable and went at once to his room. There, after lighting the candle, locking the door, and taking precaution to see that every opening was protected against prying eyes, he seated himself on the edge of the bed, and drawing from his pocket a small, carefully drawn map of the surrounding mountains, he proceeded to locate the place described by Liz. Then he blew out the candle, stole quietly down stairs and out into the night.

He walked rapidly down the road to the village, went into the barroom of the dirty little tavern, called for a drink, and stood leaning on his elbows against the bar, beating a tattoo with his fingers.

While he was still standing at the bar a rather rough looking individual who had been asleep in a chair in the corner, got up, yawned, stretched himself, and went out. Brainard stood at the bar, talked a few moments with the bartender, said at last that he guessed it was bed time, and sauntered out.

He had been gone but a short time when a sporty looking drummer, who had been playing cards for an hour and losing slightly, said he guessed he'd had enough, arose from the table and walked out. Just outside the door Brainard almost ran into two men who were passing at the moment.

Brainard apologized, one of the men made an ill natured remark, to which Brainard gave a short answer and passed on to the corner grocery, where he bought a plug of tobacco. He did not tarry there; but soon after he left, one of the party of loungers slipped quietly out and was swallowed up in the night.

Within half an hour after leaving the grocery, Brainard and the five loungers met in a thick clump of timber a little more than a mile from the village. The expression of careless indifference had left their faces. All were alert, earnest, and determined.

The plan of procedure was quickly arranged, guns and pistols were carefully examined, cartridge belts adjusted, a hurried glance was cast around

to see that no one was in sight, for the moon was now giving more light than was desirable for their purpose, and the march up the mountain began.

Brainard had hardly left the Bascom house when Liz returned, excited and breathless. In that brief interval her feelings had undergone another revulsion, and she thought only of saving her lover from the fate she had brought upon him. She rushed to Brainard's room and knocked on the door. No answer. Then she ran to the stable, where she found his horse quietly munching his corn.

This for a time reassured her, but when, after an hour of waiting Brainard did not return, she became fully convinced that her original suspicions of him were correct, and that even now he and his men (for he could not undertake such a task alone) were making their way to the lonely "still" on the mountain side.

She walked out into the road and peered up and down. At last she could bear the suspense no longer, and started up the mountain at a brisk walk.

In the mean time Brainard and his party had made good use of their time and were well on their journey. Climbing a rocky steep here, sliding into a gulch there, now stumbling over a half buried log, and now making good progress where the trees were farther apart and the underbrush less thick, they hurried on.

To accomplish their object it was absolutely necessary that they be on the ground before daybreak. It was at the dark hour before dawn when the weary climbing was over, and they gathered together in a little thicket within a hundred yards of their prey.

The "still" was working away at full blast, sending up columns of smoke and clouds of steam. In the stillness of early morning every sound could be heard.

Having arranged their plan of attack, they were about to divide and approach the "still" from opposite sides when, as Brainard threw a look backward toward the top of the mountain they had just crossed, a long streak of flame shot up into the night.

In an incredibly short time great clouds of flame and smoke were rolling skyward, lighting up the mountain tops for miles around. The beacon must have been discovered by those in the "still" almost as quickly as by those outside, for all at once there was a great bustling within. By the loud hissing sound and still thicker clouds of steam that rolled out, they judged the fires were being extinguished with water.

There was no time to be lost if the attacking party wished to reap any advantages of a surprise. so, spreading out and keeping as much within the shadow as possible, they made a quick dash for the house. They had covered little more than half the distance when there was a flash, a sharp report, and one of the Government men fell forward on his face.

Rushing on, the rest took shelter behind and within an out house a few yards from the main building, and then began a lively interchange of shots. This was kept up for a time until the out house became so riddled with bullets that it afforded but slight protection, and two of the invaders had received slight wounds.

"Get ready, boys," cried Brainard at last; "this thing has got to be settled one way or the other, mighty quick. Our only show is to get inside of that house and fight it out hand to hand."

"We're with ye, Jim," all shouted, and, with a yell, they made one more wild rush for the door, shooting as they ran.

The door, being much weakened from the many shots it had received from their Winchesters, gave way to the force of the three heavy bodies thrown against it, and the next moment such a fight was going on within that dark, steam filled room as men only make when there is no retreat possible on either side. To the detectives, defeat meant certain death; to the moonshiners, what to them was worse, a long term of imprisonment.

The fight raged on in that stifling darkness till, at last, Brainard—he never knew just how—found himself outside the house engaged in mortal combat with a powerful moonshiner who was struggling with might and main to break Brainard's hold upon his wrist that he might plunge a long wicked knife into his heart.

At last, breaking the lock which he had about the man's body and snatching his revolver from his belt, Brainard placed it close to his antagonist's side and fired.

Straightening himself up and throwing his arms above his head, the man fell, face downward, upon the ground without a groan. As he half turned on his side in his last dying convulsion Brainard recognized in the faint morning light the dark, rugged, almost handsome, features of Jeth Baxter.

The fight was now soon finished, and the detectives had won. After the smoke of battle cleared away, the results showed two dead men on the side of the moonshiners, one dead and one very badly wounded on the Government side, and not a man of either party who did not show more than one ugly gash as a result of the conflict.

From her point of vantage up among the rocks, after lighting the warning fire, Liz had stood and watched and listened to the terrible struggle going on down in the valley.

That day, in the large room of the little jail, rigid in death, Jeth Baxter and Giles Oaks lay side by side. Over in the front room of the little tavern lay the dead marshal, the first one to fall in the fight. An extra force of deputies had been brought into the town and guarded every street.

Sue Oaks had been to the jail, where she shed tears over both dead brother and lover. Liz Bascom had also been to the jail, but she shed no tears.

Just as the sun was once more setting behind the Western mountains some one came rushing into the village, breathless, to report that a woman's body had been seen floating down over the rapids, and that as soon as it reached still water several men had rushed in and dragged it out; and who should it be but Liz Bascom, whom everybody had seen but an hour or two before!

And so died poor Liz Bascom, and her secret with her. Why she had done such a thing no one knew.

Yes, one man knew, or suspected, but his business was ferreting out secrets and keeping them until needed. This one would never be needed, for the book of the lives of Jeth Baxter and Liz Bascom was closed.

THE ARGOSY.

VOL. XXIX.

FEBRUARY, 1899.

No. 3.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE BURGHES GUARDS.

BY JOHN P. RITTER.

A story of the siege of Leyden by the Spaniards—The daring venture of Maurice Van Texel in making his way through the enemy's lines—The Sea Beggars to the rescue, and the part played by the ocean in delivering Holland from the oppressor.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.—THE EDICT.

EARLY one morning in July, 1574, the citizens of Leyden were gathered in a jostling crowd before the town hall, gazing at a large printed bulletin, pasted on a wooden frame, that had just been attached to one of the columns of the portico. It was a throng such as could not have been found at that period in all Europe, save in a chartered city of the Netherlands.

All social differences were, for the time being, cast aside. Rich burghers strove with poor weavers; men of rank, beribboned and perfumed, were pushed and hauled about by ragged artisans; while, here and there, a bustling, boisterous housewife employed her lean elbows on the ribs of those within her reach, and cried out lustily for room and air. The faces of all were yellow, sunken, spectral, and their eyes gleamed with the fierce eagerness of famine, as they pressed forward in a struggling mass to reach the column upon which the bulletin was displayed.

"An infamous edict, that!" exclaimed one in the front row of the crowd—a man apparently of some consequence, for he wore a doublet of velvet richly embroidered, and there were waving plumes in his cap.

"And think ye we'll submit to it?" muttered a gaunt creature at his elbow, accompanying the words with a savage oath.

"Hardly. It would be far better to surrender the city to the Spaniards at once, than to hold out longer and perish. But can you read the printed matter, my good fellow?"

"Nay; but I can shrewdly guess its meaning. Doubtless 'tis another law of our tyrannous burgomaster, by which he hopes to starve us further."

"You have guessed aright," was the reply. Then, raising his voice above the sullen murmurs of the throng, he of the plumes and velvet cried:

"Are there any here who cannot read the print?"

"Aye, aye and aye!" came from various parts of the assemblage. "Let us hear it, good sir! Read it! Read it!"

The cavalier mounted the steps of the portico, and, stretching out his arms over the sea of heads beneath him to command silence, prefaced his reading with the following remarks:

"My good friends, you all must remember what the Prince of Orange promised us when the Spaniards first laid siege to our beloved city. He implored us to hold out bravely, and to put our faith in his assurance that he would speedily devise a means for our deliverance. Trusting him, we took up arms, strengthened our defenses and repelled our besiegers in many bloody battles. We even allowed our burgomaster to purchase all the provisions in the city, and to dole them out to us in a meager daily allowance, so that there might be no waste of food. This allowance has been reduced time after time, until at present we are undergoing all the horrors of slow starvation. Yet, as if it were not sufficient for us to see our wives and children die of famine, as if we had not suffered enough already, our pitiful rations have been cut down again, while the promised deliverance is no nearer than it was two months ago."

The speaker paused, and immediately a tremendous shout arose from his auditors:

"Bread! We demand bread! Down with the burgomaster! Death to the tyrant!"

A thousand arms rose simultaneously above the heads of the people; some clenched and shaking defiance; others brandishing weapons, or waving caps. Again the cavalier stretched forth his hands, palms downward to enforce silence, and when the excitement of the mob had somewhat subsided, he turned to the bulletin and began reading in a clear, ringing voice:

"The city councilors in meeting assembled have passed the following decree: Whereas the store of provisions in the keeping of the authorities has been greatly reduced, and Whereas the fate of our country and unborn generations depends on our holding Leyden against the Spanish invader until succor arrives, Therefore it is enacted that on and after August 1st. the daily allowance of food to each citizen shall be as follows: Two ounces of meat and two ounces of bread to a full grown man, and to the rest a due proportion.

ADRIAN VAN DER WERF, BURGOMASTER."

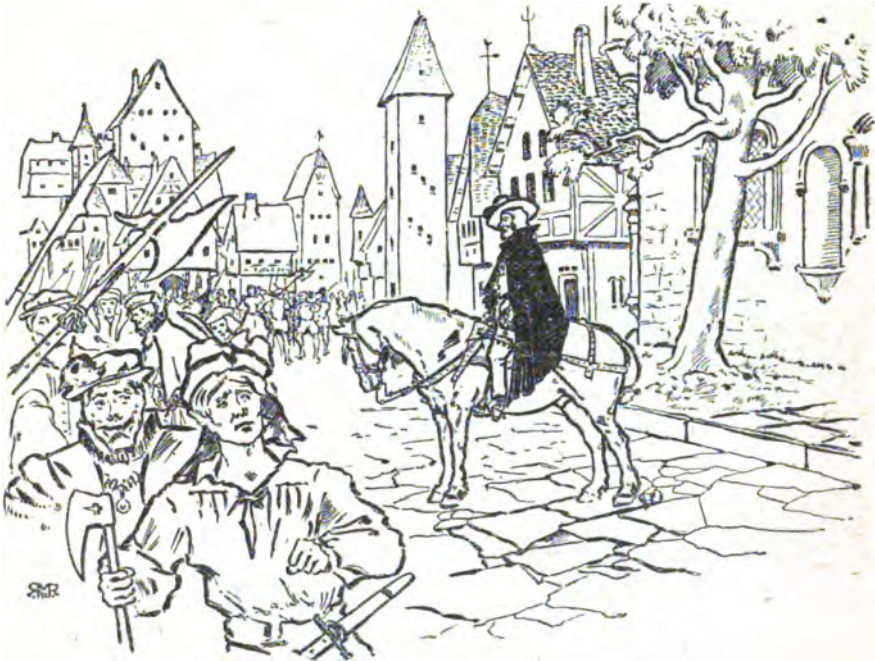
When the reader had finished a great wave of sound issued from the multitude—an ominous, threatening roar like that of a mighty wind impeded by a forest in its furious career. Back and forth, to right and left, swayed the mob, until a common impulse carried its foremost members up the steps of the portico to the column to which the bulletin was fastened. The cavalier was instantly swallowed up by the seething mass.

Presently several men were raised upon the shoulders of the crowd; and swinging axes with incredible fury, they dashed the wooden frame into a hundred pieces, whirling the fragments over the heads of those who stood in the square below.

As the pieces fell among them the people cheered tumultuously.

Strong in numbers and consequently fearless—at a time when no single man among them would have dared to lift his voice against the burgomaster's edict—they were on the point of breaking into open rebellion against all constituted authority, when an incident occurred which completely confounded and subdued them.

All at once, on the opposite side of the square, appeared a solitary horseman, standing as motionless as an equestrian statue. He was at right angles to the rioters, his head turned askew and facing them.



THE SOLITARY HORSEMAN STOOD AS MOTIONLESS AS AN EQUESTRIAN STATUE.

He had taken up his position in front of the church of St. Pancras, with its high brick tower surmounted by two pointed turrets, and with two ancient lime trees at its entrance. There he had halted—a tall, haggard, imposing figure, with dark visage, and a tranquil but commanding eye. His cap was plumed, and a long, black mantle, fastened at the throat, hung down over his horse's flanks, yet not low enough to conceal the point of a burnished scabbard.

The axmen, flushed with their defiance of the law as with a victory, had descended from the portico, and, still borne upon the shoulders of their sympathizers, were making their way in triumph across the square, when they suddenly became aware of this man's scrutiny.

"'Tis Adrian Van der Werf!" cried one, leaping down into the crowd to avoid recognition.

At the same instant the others dropped from the shoulders of their supporters and disappeared.

Then the mob, filling the air with mad threats and reproaches, crossed the square and gathered round the horseman.

"Ah, tyrant; you would starve us!" they cried. "Enough of this terrible siege! Surrender the town that we and our loved ones may live!"

The burgomaster smiled grimly. Waving his cap for silence, he exclaimed in tones of inflexible resolve:

"What would ye, my friends? Why do ye murmur that we do not break our vows and surrender the city to the Spaniards?—a fate more horrible than the agony which she now endures. I tell you I have made an oath to hold the city, and may God give me strength to keep it! I can die but once; whether by your hands, the enemy's, or by the hand of God. My fate is indifferent to me, not so that of the city intrusted to my care.

"I know that we shall starve if not soon relieved," he continued; "but starvation is preferable to the dishonored death which is the only alternative. Your menaces move me not. My life is at your disposal. Here is my sword! Plunge it into my breast, and divide my flesh among you! Take my body to appease your hunger; but expect no surrender so long as I remain alive."

The words of the stout burgomaster produced a marvelous effect upon that multitude of starving specters. Those on the outskirts of the mob crept away silently and swiftly; the people began dispersing in all directions, as if inspired with shame and horror at the lawless act they had committed, leaving Adrian Van der Werf alone in the deserted square.

One man had conquered a thousand by the sovereign power of his will.

CHAPTER II.—THE CONFERENCE.

THE burgomaster followed the retreating figures of the rioters with a steadfast gaze, and, when the last one had disappeared, put spurs to his horse and galloped quickly across the square to the town hall.

Dismounting at the entrance, he tied his steed to a poplar, passed through the great arched door under the portico, and made his way to the council chamber. There he found John Van der Does, the military commandant of the city, engaged in earnest consultation with several of the councilmen. From the expression of their faces it was evident that the subject undergoing discussion was very grave.

"You have arrived most luckily, my friend," said the commandant, rising to greet him. "We were about to send for you, as we need your advice."

"And believe me I would have joined you sooner, had I not been interrupted on the way," responded Van der Werf.

"Interrupted? What mean you?"

"That as I came into the square I was beset by a mob of gaunt and ragged specters clamoring for bread."

"Indeed?" answered the commandant gravely. "Then it must have been their mad shouts that reached our ears just now."

"They threatened me, gentlemen," continued the burgomaster, turning to the councilmen. "They demanded my life because I refused to surrender the city to the Spaniards. They heaped execrations upon my head for again

reducing their allowance of food. God knows I pity the poor creatures, but what can I do?"

"And yet you satisfied them, for they dispersed in silence," suggested one of the councilmen.

"Aye, I offered them my body to appease their hunger; but told them that as long as I lived Leyden would never surrender."

"Nor as long as I remain in command here," added the gallant Van der Does.

"You express our sentiments, gentlemen," said the councilman who had already spoken. "Indeed, it is on this very question of resistance that we need the burgomaster's advice."

Van der Werf mounted the steps of the little platform at one end of the apartment reserved for the chief magistrate of the city, and here he sat down in a great high backed chair of carved oak to preside at the conference his coming had interrupted.

"You may proceed, gentlemen," he said. "I am listening."

The commandant was the first to speak.

"I have come here this morning," he began, "to lay before your honorable body the exact condition of the forces under my command, and to implore your assistance. When the Spanish general, Valdez, first appeared before this city, on the twenty sixth of May last, he brought with him eight thousand Walloons and Germans. To oppose this formidable force Leyden could muster but one small corps of Zealanders, and five companies of the Burgher Guard. The command of this little army was given to me. As it was far from being sufficient to man the ramparts, I enlisted, with your permission, a supplementary force of citizens, whom I drilled in the art of war, until it became as capable and as valiant as any body of troops in the enemy's camp.

"But my little army has been sadly reduced by pestilence and constant warfare until it is again a mere handful of warriors, while the army of Valdez has been daily increased to over ten thousand men. Indeed, if Valdez should attempt to carry the city by storm now, it would be impossible to resist him successfully. I ask, therefore, for a proclamation making it obligatory upon every citizen capable of bearing arms to take an active part in the defense of the city."

"Your request shall be complied with," said the burgomaster with emphasis.

The commandant bowed his acknowledgments and sat down.

A venerable councilman, Jan Fruytiers by name, now arose and addressed the burgomaster in tones that trembled with emotion.

"On my way to the town hall this morning," he said, "I observed that everywhere want is showing its teeth like a dog. I encountered squads of soldiers clad in rags. The faces of all were black, sunken, and overgrown with beard. Their legs were weak under them, and involuntarily came the question, What will become of these hitherto victorious men a week or two hence?"

"I passed through a square. It was in ruins, and covered over with mounds of freshly raised earth—the graves of the dead. I passed by groups of haggard men and women, and weeping children—all mere skeletons, with

scarce a rag to cover their aching bones—and some cried out to me for bread, while others sat in silent misery, patiently awaiting death. And again the question came, How long can these poor creatures endure?

"I know, gentlemen," he continued, "that we have resolved to perish rather than surrender; but do you realize how near the end we are? You will say that eternal glory will be our portion if we die in defense of our city; but I ask you will our death save Leyden from the hands of the hated Spaniards? And, if Leyden falls, will it not mean the utter ruin of our country? Oh, I implore you to harken to my advice! Send a messenger this very night to William the Silent, asking him to hurry forward the deliverance he promised at the beginning of this dreadful siege. We have not heard from him in many days. Can it be that he has abandoned us to our fate?"

"On that score," broke in the commandant, "I can set your mind at rest. We are invested so closely by the Spaniards at present that it would be impossible for any messenger to make his way through their lines."

"Which is an unfortunate circumstance," added the burgomaster, "as I am inclined to favor the good councilman's suggestion. The picture he has presented of the desperate condition of affairs in this city is not in the least overdrawn. We will all die of starvation unless succor speedily arrives. The Prince of Orange must be informed at once of the exact straits we are in; yet how can this be done if we are so thoroughly invested by the Spaniards that a messenger cannot penetrate their lines?"

"Nevertheless, I assure you, worthy burgomaster," said the commandant with a sorrowful shake of the head, "that Valdez has so possessed every road, dike and stream leading out of Leyden that a mouse could not squeeze through."

"And yet it must be done," answered Van der Werf sternly.

"But whom can you get to volunteer for the mission?" asked the other. "It is evident death, aye and worst than death; for Valdez would be sure to torture any messenger he might capture in order to extort information."

"And still I will send a man on the mission. Doubtless one can be found of sufficient virtue to undertake the task."

"The Spaniards have erected sixty five redoubts around Leyden; they have pickets and patrols without number; every exit from the city is guarded."

"Nevertheless, a messenger shall be sent," replied the burgomaster.

At that moment the roar of cannon and the rattle of musketry sounded from the ramparts, and the conference came to an end.

John Van der Does hurried away to that part of the city wall from which the firing proceeded, to inspire the defenders by his presence, and the worthy burgomaster descended from his chair of state and buckled on the sword he had laid aside while exercising his magisterial functions. Then he hastened out of the town hall, and mounting his horse, sped off to the scene of action.

CHAPTER III.—THE ASSAULT.

AT this period Leyden was one of the most beautiful cities in the Netherlands. Placed in the midst of broad and fruitful pastures, protected by a

series of gigantic dikes from the inroads of the mighty sea, it was surrounded by a great battlemented wall, bristling with cannon and other engines of defense.

Through the heart of the city flowed the ancient Rhine, multiplied into innumerable canals, and these watery streets were shaded by lime trees, poplars and willows, and crossed by one hundred and fifty bridges of hammered stone.

In the center of the city, crowning the summit of an artificial mound, rose an immense round tower of unknown antiquity. From this commanding height, during the long and terrible siege we are describing, many an eye was strained anxiously upon the horizon beyond the city wall, watching for the promised succor.

While John Van der Does, the commandant, was attending the conference in the town hall that morning, his daughter, Jacqueline, had mounted to the tower's platform to escape from the scenes of misery in the town below, and to console her aching heart with music.

The sweet tones of her voice, accompanied and sustained by harmonious twangs and delicate flourishes struck by her rapid fingers from a psaltery which she played, hovered round the quaint, old structure like a flock of wild song birds.

Those passing in the street beneath heard the music, and raised their eyes in wonder to the sky, not knowing whence the sounds proceeded.

"Jacqueline!"

The girl stopped in the middle of an interlude and glanced over her shoulder.

"Why, Maurice Van Texel! How came you here?"

"In no miraculous manner, sweet lady, you may be sure; but by the steep ladders of the keep."

"Ah, you saw me come here, and so followed me," she said in tones of reproach.

He bowed his head in assent.

"And was it the act of an honorable cavalier?" she added gently. "Was it right of you to seek me here alone?"

"But how else could I see you, Jacqueline?" he asked. "Have you forgotten that your father has forbidden me his house?"

"No, I have not forgotten," she answered; "but you should certainly respect me more than to seek a clandestine meeting." A moment afterwards she added impulsively, "Oh, Maurice, Maurice, why will you not leave me to my duty?"

"Because I love you," was the impassioned reply.

Jacqueline turned her face away from him to hide her emotion, and looked wistfully at the sky.

"Won't you please leave me?" she asked pleadingly.

"Not until you grant me at least one gleam of hope," he cried. "I certainly have a right to know your mind."

"Yes, the past gives you that right," she said musingly. "We have been such good friends that it would be wrong to deceive you now." Then, turning

her beautiful eyes full upon him, "So you want me to encourage you to hope, Maurice? My dear friend, I cannot. I love my father too devotedly ever to oppose his wishes. Remember, I am all he has to love in the world. I have promised him never to see you more, and it would break his heart if I should prove untrue to my word."

At that moment the boom of a cannon sounded from the city wall. The young man sprang to the platform railing and looked down. Beyond the ramparts he could see a large body of Spanish soldiery advancing to the assault, and realizing that his place was among the defenders, he started to leave the tower. But as he reached the top of the ladder, he paused and, turning to the girl, cried scornfully:

"It is evident, my lady, that you never loved me in the least."

Jacqueline cast upon him a wondering look, and answered beseechingly:

"Oh, cannot you understand?"

With these words ringing in his ears the despairing cavalier descended quickly from the tower and hurried to the scene of battle.

As captain of the Burghier Guard, Maurice Van Texel was a personage of no small importance in that beleaguered city. The inhabitants looked upon him as one of their most doughty defenders, and now as he made his way through the streets and across the canals on a run, many followed after him with the hope of witnessing one of those acts of prowess that had rendered him famous.

As he sprang upon the ramparts, the cannon stationed there bellowed with one voice, and the masonry quivered under his feet. This discharge was immediately followed by a prolonged rattle of musketry. Looking over the wall, he could see the advancing columns of the enemy waver and break before that storm of missiles; but they closed again in an instant and pressed resolutely on.

John Van der Does, Seigneur of Nordwyck, stood a little in the rear of the defenders, directing their operations, and by his side was Adrian Van der Werf, the burgomaster. At the sight of the haughty commandant, the heart of Van Texel was filled with rage and hate.

"I am good enough to serve you, fight for you, bleed for you," he thought bitterly; "but not good enough to enter the portals of your home. But we shall see about that, my proud seigneur."

He now hastened to assume command of his Guards, who, during his absence, had been fighting under the leadership of a lieutenant. This gallant officer, whose name was Nicholas Hasselaer, loved his captain devotedly, and, observing the dark cloud upon his brow, approached him and inquired anxiously:

"Has anything gone wrong, Maurice?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because you seem to be perturbed."

"And most naturally, seeing that we have but a handful of men to oppose to the whole Spanish army."

Realizing the truth of this remark, Hasselaer became very grave. Looking down upon the plain, he observed that the enemy were advancing to the

assault by thousands. Moreover, they had chosen the lowest and weakest part of the wall for the attempt.

Upon the ramparts stood but a few hundred emaciated, famished men, with torn coats, rusty weapons, shattered muskets in their hands, eager enough to give battle, but lacking the endurance to resist long. The lieutenant raised his eyes to heaven, and his lips moved in silent prayer.

"May God aid the cause of Holland this day!" he muttered.

Just then one of the Spanish officers was heard to shout out from the field below:

"Now, men, on a run, on a run!"

Immediately the advancing columns rushed with all their impetus to the ramparts, under which refuge from the cannon could be found. In front ran a company of pioneers, with boards and timbers to span the moat; then came several regiments of halberdiers and pikemen, with long scaling ladders to mount the wall; the rear was brought up by a battalion of arquebusiers.

After advancing a short distance, the latter halted and opened a galling fire upon the defenders to keep them from the edge of the ramparts.

In the mean time the besieged were not idle.

In tones that rang like a trumpet the commandant issued his orders. The artillery began to vomit iron and fire; guns great and small roared along the ramparts, until the air was red and the daylight hidden in smoke.

Yet for all this the Spaniards arrived at the moat and spanned it with their bridges. Many were slain before they reached the other side; but as fast as they fell into the ditch, others rushed forward to take their places. At last a number of scaling ladders were seen to tremble against the wall, and the enemy swarmed up them to the assault.

Those who gained the top were immediately engaged in a deadly hand to hand combat with the defenders. Religious frenzy raged in the breasts of besiegers and besieged alike. Quarter was neither asked nor given. The rampart grew slippery with blood. Men grasped it, and the next moment slid back into the moat.

The guns were now silent, yet the uproar was so great that no word of command could be heard—nothing but shouts of rage, shrieks of agony, oaths, imprecations, groans, all merged in a general and terrible pandemonium of sound.

For a long time the brave Hollanders withstood that terrific onslaught; but they had not the strength to hold out. Pushed from their places, constantly opposed to fresh combatants who came pouring up the ladders in a continuous stream to take the place of the slain, crushed with the weight of overwhelming numbers, they were gradually driven back. Yet they defended themselves with such fury that the enemy fell around them by scores.

"Nothing but a miracle can save Leyden now," cried the wretched Van der Werf.

"And the miracle has come—look!" exclaimed the Seigneur of Nordwyck, who was standing by his side.

The burgomaster glanced in the direction indicated, and beheld a wondrous spectacle.

An army of ragged skeletons was sweeping along the ramparts, filling the air with frenzied cries. The inhabitants of Leyden, women as well as men, were hastening to the aid of their heroic defenders.

"I stand in no need of your promised proclamation to make fighters of these citizens, burgomaster," cried the Seigneur of Nordwyck exultingly. "They will fight of their own free will."

Nearer and nearer came that frenzied multitude, and it could be seen that some were armed with clubs, some with axes and knives, others with stones and staves. They pressed onward with an awful howling, now crowding together, now scattering to the right and left, until they reached the scene of conflict, and hurled themselves upon their enemies like an avalanche.

How many of them fell before the skilled resistance of the Spaniards will never be known. Those who came first wished to fall back; but, pressed onward from behind, could not, and died in their tracks. They tore over one another like raging wolves, and, when their weapons were struck from their hands, fell upon their enemies with fists and teeth.

While the battle was at its fiercest, the burgomaster chanced to cast his glance beyond the ramparts. He uttered an exclamation of astonishment. A mounted squadron of the Burgher Guards was sweeping across the plain towards the Spanish host like a devouring flame. He knew them by the wretched rags that fluttered from their bodies.

At their head rode a horseman of gigantic size, brandishing a glittering sword in the air.

The arquebusiers of the enemy poured a shower of slugs and bullets upon the devoted troop, but without harm, for the horses were going like a whirlwind. Presently the squadron struck the Spanish columns in the middle and broke them in two.

Instantly all was confusion.

Amazed at the daring of the sortie, the enemy turned and fled. The defeat was terrible and complete. Pursued to the edge of an extensive and shallow mere—called by the inhabitants of Leyden the Freshwater Lake—they were driven over one another into the water, where, in the madness of terror and disorder, hundreds perished miserably by drowning.

With the possibility of reinforcement thus cut off, the assailants upon the ramparts soon lost heart and fell an easy prey to the furious inhabitants of Leyden. They scrambled down the ladders, dropped into the moat and scattered in panic stricken flight. The city was saved—saved by the stout hearts of its inhabitants, and by the genius and courage of an officer.

Later in the day, Adrian Van der Werf, meeting the Seigneur of Nordwyck on the city wall, drew him aside and inquired:

"Who was the cavalier who led that gallant sortie?"

"A daredevil swashbuckler, Maurice Van Texel by name," answered Van der Does contemptuously.

"What, the captain of the Burgher Guards?"

"The same," answered Van der Does.

The honest burgomaster bowed his head upon his breast and fell to musing; then, turning suddenly to the commandant, he said:

"I have found a man for my mission, seigneur. I have found a hero to save Leyden."

"And his name?"

"Maurice Van Texel," was the reply.

CHAPTER IV.—VAN TEXEL STARTS ON A DANGEROUS MISSION.

WHILE Van Texel was sitting alone in his quarters that night, a prey to the most despairing reflections, a messenger arrived from the burgomaster requesting his presence at the town hall.

"Tell your master that I will be with him presently," he answered gloomily.

When the messenger had departed, he threw a cloak over his doublet, clapped a broad brimmed felt hat on his head, and started for the council chamber where Van der Werf was awaiting him. He found the burgomaster alone.

"I have sent for you, captain," began the latter, "to intrust you with a very hazardous enterprise—that is, if you are willing to undertake it."

"The more hazardous the better," responded Maurice curtly; for since his interview with Jacqueline that morning he had lost all love of life.

"After witnessing your exploit today," continued Van der Werf, "you may be sure I entertain no fear of your courage. You proved yourself to be not only brave, captain, but sagacious as well. That sortie of yours was particularly well timed. It was a positive stroke of genius."

"I did no more than my duty," said Maurice modestly.

"I am glad you regard your conduct in that light," returned the burgomaster; "for it shows that you have a very exalted idea of the nature of duty. Indeed, it encourages me to hope that you will volunteer for the service I am about to propose to you."

"Volunteer?"

"Yes; for I could not find it in my heart to command a brave soldier like you to go to evident death. You must undertake this mission from a sense of duty to your suffering fellow townsmen, in an exalted spirit of self sacrifice to the demands of your country, or not at all. It is not a task to be undertaken by a hireling."

"Yet what am I but a hireling?" said the young man with a bitter laugh. "I believe I am on the pay roll of the States, am I not?"

"Perhaps," returned the burgomaster indifferently; "but I am very sure that yours is not a mercenary spirit. Therefore, I will state the service I would have you undertake, and then let you accept or reject it as you may choose."

Curious to learn the nature of the mission about to be proposed to him, Van Texel bent forward eagerly and listened.

After a few preliminary coughs and hems Van der Werf proceeded as follows:

"It is unnecessary for me to tell you, captain, that this city cannot hold out much longer. Starvation is staring us in the face, and unless deliverance

arrives within a short time, there will be no one alive to man the walls. Leyden will fall into the hands of the Spaniards for lack of defenders. Nor is that all. With our enemies in possession of this city, the fate of the Netherlands will be sealed. It will be impossible to continue the heroic struggle in which we are engaged, and we will relapse into our former state of subjection to the yoke of Spain."

"Death before that!" exclaimed the young cavalier earnestly.

"Amen!" returned the burgomaster in tones of profound solemnity. "And it will come to that at last—death to us all," he added, "unless the Prince of Orange sends us speedy aid. At the beginning of the siege he promised to do so; but we have been waiting in vain for him to keep his word. Now there must be some reason for this. I am convinced that if he knew the sad straits we are in, and it lay in his power to relieve us, he would hasten to our assistance at once. But he does not know of our plight. The Spaniards have so thoroughly invested the city that we have not been able to communicate with him for two weeks."

"And you want some one to steal through their lines with a message to the prince, informing him of the danger that threatens us?" suggested Van Texel.

"Exactly."

"And to implore him to send us deliverance at once?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I will undertake the mission," said Maurice quietly.

The burgomaster was beside himself with joy. He sprang towards the young cavalier and embraced him warmly.

"God bless you, dear captain!" he cried in ecstasy. "You will be the savior of your country. You will be the means of delivering thousands of poor, famishing wretches from starvation."

"If I succeed," was the calm rejoinder.

"But you will succeed," said the good burgomaster in a tone of confidence. "You are not the kind of man to fail. I discovered that when I saw you attack the Spaniards today. I said to the Seigneur of Nordwyck: 'There is the hero to save Leyden.'"

"And pray what did the Seigneur of Nordwyck answer?" asked Maurice with a sneer.

"John Van der Does regards the mission as hopeless," replied the burgomaster. "He holds it impossible for a messenger to pass the Spanish lines."

"He may be right," said Van Texel, with a barely perceptible smile; "yet I should like to prove him wrong."

The two men now proceeded to discuss plans for the proposed expedition. It was agreed that, as it was too late to start out that night, the attempt should be postponed until after nightfall on the following evening. In the mean time Van Texel would have an opportunity to say farewell to his friends, and dispose of his worldly affairs with the same finality as if he were going to certain death.

"I shall not intrust you with a written message to the prince," said the burgomaster in conclusion; "for if you should be captured it would betray

our weakness to the enemy. You are to repeat to William the Silent all that I have told you, and, in order that he may know that you speak with authority, I will give you this credential"—here he slipped a signet ring on one of the young man's fingers.

"I have but one more word to add to my instructions," he went on; "it is this: If you should fall into the hands of the Spaniards I implore you, as you hope for salvation in the world to come, to submit to every torture rather than betray to them the desperate condition of our affairs. Can I trust you in this?"

"I will hold my tongue even should they flay me alive," was the resolute answer.

"Bravely spoken!" said the burgomaster approvingly. "And now farewell!"

He embraced the young man again fervently, and followed him to the door of the council chamber. Then he returned to his place, and, falling upon his knees, prayed long and earnestly that God would guide his messenger safely to the prince, so that the famished inhabitants of Leyden might be delivered from their sufferings.

* * * * *

The night was windy, dark and wet. The soldiers, wearied with watching on the ramparts, dozed, leaning on their weapons. Here and there on the plain below gleamed the faint light of a watch fire. Occasionally the silence was broken by the neighing of a horse, or the plaintive sound of a lute, borne by the wind from the enemy's encampment; then quiet reigned again.

Presently one of the sentinels was aroused from his lethargy by the low hum of voices, and, raising his head from his breast, saw two men approaching along the wall. One was tall and powerfully built, the other of medium height and slender proportions. They were attired in long military cloaks, and the broad brims of their felt hats were pulled down over their faces.

"Halt! Who goes there!" he cried, springing out from the shadow of the ramparts and barring the way with his long barreled musket.

The tall man drew near and raised his hat brim.

"What! Don't you recognize your own captain, Andreas?" he asked.

"Ah, it is Captain Van Texel! And the other—yes, is Lieutenant Hasselaer! Pardon me, gentlemen; for my sight is dim from hunger!"

He brought his musket to his shoulder, saluted and allowed them to pass on.

"And so you think you can pass safely through the enemy's lines by way of the Freshwater Lake?" said the lieutenant when they were beyond the sentinel's hearing.

"Such is my opinion. At all events, I am more likely to succeed in that direction than in any other. You may remember that there is a broad canal leading out of the lake to the sea. Favored by the darkness, I may be able, by keeping in the middle of this waterway, to swim past their patrols and pickets without being seen."

"But the distance, my dear Maurice; it is fully five miles across the lake, to say nothing of the canal. You seem to have forgotten that."

"And you seem to have forgotten that I am a Hollander," answered Van Texel proudly. "The water is our native element, my dear Nicholas."

They walked along in silence for a time, and then Hasselaer ventured the question:

"Do you know where to find the prince? That seems to be an important consideration."

"When last heard from he was in Rotterdam," answered Van Texel. "I intend to seek him there."

By this time they had reached that part of the ramparts that looked down upon the mere, stretching far away beneath them enveloped in mystery and gloom. The wind swept over it with a mournful, moaning sound that made the lieutenant shudder.

"I wish with all my heart, Maurice, that you were not going on this fool-hardy errand," he said, with an effort to conceal his emotion. "Oh, why did you ever undertake it?"

"It was necessary that some one should go," his friend answered quietly; "and why should not I?"

"Because you are needed here, Maurice," said Hasselaer earnestly. "Because, with you absent, the soldiers will lose their courage. Oh, my dear comrade," he added, brushing the tears from his eyes, "I implore you to let me go in your stead!"

Van Texel laid his hand gently upon his friend's shoulder and endeavored to cheer him.

"Take heart, my brother;" he said kindly. "Would you unman me by grieving, now that we are about to part?"

With a supreme effort Hasselaer regained his self control.

"Pardon me, comrade!" he cried with assumed bravery. "It was wrong of me to discourage you; for, after all, it is possible that you may perform your mission in safety."

Nevertheless, it was apparent from the tones of his voice that he entertained no such hope.

"I will do my best to succeed," said Van Texel gloomily, "if only for the sake of the poor starving wretches who depend on me for succor; but, if I should fail and fall into the enemy's hands"—here his voice sank into a despairing whisper—"do not grieve for me, dear friend, for I shall welcome death most willingly."

While speaking, he embraced Hasselaer for the last time and climbed upon the rampart.

"Farewell!"

As this word issued from his lips he dropped into the moat.

Looking over the wall, Hasselaer saw his shadowy figure emerge on the opposite bank, turn to wave a last good by, and vanish in the gloom.

CHAPTER V.—THE BEGINNING OF PERIL.

BETWEEN the moat and the beginning of the mere, stretched the battlefield of the day before, strewn with corpses. As the night was exceedingly

dark Van Texel was obliged to proceed with great caution to avoid stumbling over them. Yet, for all his care, this sometimes occurred, and then he would start back with a strange feeling of repugnance, and pick his way with increased prudence.

Over the field of death the deepest silence reigned. It weighed down upon his spirits like a stone.

He looked over his shoulder at the ramparts he had just left. Their black outlines were barely distinguishable against the dark sky. Here and there in a watch tower a faint light twinkled, reminding him of the brave comrades who kept a continuous guard over the starving city.

He cast his eyes upon the battlefield, and a sudden fear took possession of him; for here was desolation, darkness, corpses; around him innumerable ghostly terrors; ahead an army of sworn, pitiless enemies. At that moment famished Leyden seemed a calm, peaceful, safe haven.

Should he turn back?

There was still time. He could return in safety to the city wall, call one of the sentinels to assist him to mount the ramparts, and make his way to the town hall, where he could represent to the burgomaster that the mission he had undertaken exceeded human power. For a brief moment the love of life grew strong within him; then he thought of his interview with Jacqueline, and, with despair in his heart, pressed on.

What was that? Did he see a shadowy figure rise from the battlefield, or was it a trick of the imagination? A slight tremor passes down his spine; for the apparition shifts before him again, this time not more than twenty yards away. The next instant he sees, not one figure, but two, rising against the sky line and moving rapidly toward him, then stooping down and disappearing from his vision. Still, they may be creations of his overwrought fancy.

Suddenly the figures appear before him for the third time, not ten yards off, and he realizes beyond a doubt that they are of real flesh and blood. A violent trembling seizes his limbs. It is too late to withdraw, and he stands for a moment hesitating what to do. But it is only for a moment; for the next instant he has thrown himself prone upon the ground.

In that short interval of time the truth has flashed upon him. He now knows that the approaching figures are those of camp followers of the Spanish army—jackals, who in all ages of the world's history have followed in the wake of battle to prey upon the fallen.

With his face upturned to the inky sky, Van Texel holds his breath and simulates death. Will the robbers pass him by?

He hears their stealthy footsteps approach nearer and nearer. He hears their voices, as they converse together in whispers. And now they are bending over him, and he can feel their breath upon his face.

"Aye, but this is a monstrous big man," whispers one of the ghouls in amazement. "He must have put up a brave fight from the size of him."

"True, my lad!" responded the other, "and, by our faith! he is a heretic. He wears the garb of a burgher."

"More's the luck!" exclaimed the first speaker, "for these doughty rebels

are rarely empty in pockets, however lean and starved they may be in paunch. In sooth, we are likely to find good store of florins in his carcass."

While speaking, he laid rude hands upon the prostrate giant and proceeded to rifle his garments.

Now it chanced that the good burgomaster had provided his messenger with ample means for his journey, and Van Texel was not the kind of man to part with his gold without a struggle. At the moment the robber's hand touched the belt containing his florins, he suddenly sat upright, and gave utterance to a cry of defiance and rage.

"Scoundrels! Cut purse villains! Robbers of the dead!" he roared fiercely.

This sudden coming back to life of one they had deemed a corpse filled the rogues with such dismay and terror that they turned and fled howling. Van Texel saw them disappear in the darkness and hurried in pursuit; but he had not gone far when he realized the folly of his conduct, and came to a sudden stop.

"It will never do to give way to my passions in this manner," he mused. "I must learn to control myself better. Doubtless these rascals will alarm the Spanish camp; but no, that is not likely after all, for they have their own skins to look after. If it should be known that they were engaged in robbing the dead, the soldiers would flay them alive. I need have no fear on their score."

Waiting until he heard the footsteps of the varlets die away in the darkness Maurice turned his face toward the mere and again pressed on. As he drew closer and closer to the lake he could hear the sobbing of the wind among the rushes that grew upon its margin, and the melancholy splashing of its waves upon the shore. He knew by the sounds that he was in close proximity to the first picket line of his enemies, and that it would be necessary for him to proceed with greater caution.

So he put himself on hands and knees and began to crawl.

For a quarter of an hour he advanced in this awkward fashion, straining his eyes into the darkness ahead, and with his hearing on edge, for any sight or sound that might indicate the presence of a Spanish sentinel. The clouds had condensed into a rain as fine as mist, which made the darkness even more impenetrable than before, and it was his hope that he might be enabled to pass by the pickets unobserved; but it was fated otherwise.

He had succeeded in reaching a point within sight of the tall rushes of the mere, when a dark figure suddenly arose from among them. Van Texel dropped flat upon the ground; but, even as he did so, the figure pushed its way slowly out of the rushes, and came to a halt close beside him. He held his breath and remained like one dead. For a moment the profoundest silence reigned; then a suppressed voice was heard to mutter:

"Strange! that this body should be lying here now. I certainly did not observe it when I passed this way a moment ago."

Van Texel's hair stood on end; for he could hear the clank of steel as the picket strode toward him.

He gathered his huge limbs together and awaited the issue. His only

weapon was a dagger ; for he had left his sword and pistols behind him, knowing that they would be burdensome to a swimmer. So, clutching the hilt of this little poinard, he drew it stealthily from its sheath.

" Art dead ? "

This question was asked gruffly in Spanish, and was accompanied by the kick of a heavy boot.

At that instant something rustled in the darkness, a gigantic form sprang suddenly from the ground, and there was a quick flash of steel.

" Holy Virgin ! "

This cry was scarcely uttered when it was smothered by a moaning gasp. There was heard the thud of a body falling upon the ground, and all was over.

Van Texel moved on toward the mere.

Passing through the rushes, he came presently to the water, which stretched out before him like a black, limitless, unfathomable sea. The wind swept over it, moaning like a lost soul.

At the sound he shuddered, and his heart sank within him.

It had been his intention, on reaching the lake to plunge boldly into the water and swim straight across to the canal, which was its outlet ; but now that he stood gazing upon its dark, mysterious expanse, and felt its cold waves lapping his feet, he shrank back in terror, crying aloud in an agony of despair :

" Oh, I dare not, I dare not ! "

It was not the water that affrighted him, nor yet the darkness, but a supernatural dread of the unknown perils that might lay hidden beneath the black surface of the mere. He remembered how he had driven hundreds of the enemy into it during the battle of the previous day, and it seemed to him now that its inky depths exuded the odor of their corpses. Might not their ghosts be awaiting him out there in the gloom ? The thought was a terrible one.

Just then a fitful gust stirred the reeds around him to motion. Their long stems wound around his knees. He trembled like an aspen ; for it seemed to his excited fancy that one of his drowned enemies was clutching at his legs to keep him from going farther.

Again the temptation came to him to abandon his mission and turn back ; but while he stood irresolute, debating what to do, the clouds above him



THERE WAS A QUICK FLASH OF STEEL.

broke apart, revealing a brilliant, solitary star, that shone like the eyes of a seraphim peering through the veil of heaven. At the sight of this glorious planet all his terrors vanished, and he was again possessed with a determination to succeed.

"God is watching thee, dreamer!" he muttered sternly. "Awake, and press onward!"

Before him lay a thousand deadly perils; but he heeded them not. Stripping off his boots and doublet he splashed boldly into the water, until it reached his waist, and then struck out again resolutely into the intense darkness.

CHAPTER VI.—AFLOAT WITH THE DEAD.

KEEPING his face fixed on that luminous star, Van Texel swam on until the shore behind him receded from his sight, and all around him were the dark waters.

He struck out vigorously with arms and legs, while the water parted in ripples from his chin. Yet for all his exertions he could not keep his blood from growing chill and sluggish, for the waters of the lake were icy cold.

Presently the star disappeared behind a mass of flying clouds, and with the extinguishing of its cheering light, all his terrors returned. It seemed to him like the going out of the last faint beacon of hope, and for the third time he was tempted to turn back. Nevertheless he swam on, impelled by the energy of despair; for he realized that it was now too late to hesitate, and he must go forward.

All at once a dark object appeared bobbing on the water before him, moving in his direction as if imbued with life.

He almost screamed with fright, thinking it some foul creature of the deep, perhaps a dragon; but at that instant, he saw that it was only a floating corpse and restrained his cry. Turning from his course, he swam round it with fear and aversion, and passed on.

He had not proceeded far, however, when a second corpse came floating toward him, and soon afterwards a third and a fourth. It was evident that many of the Spaniards who had been driven into the lake the day before, had been killed before reaching the water, and so had not sunk beneath the surface.

In this hideous company Van Texel became dizzy with horror. His brain reeled, and a violent trembling seized him in every limb, so that he had great difficulty to persevere in the motions of swimming. But he struggled bravely with his fears and prayed at the same time.

An hour passed by; and now he was beset by a danger more terrible than any he had yet encountered—exhaustion.

It was not without reason that Hasselaer had warned him of this peril; for a five mile journey across that dark and chilly mere was a task that the strongest swimmer might well hesitate to venture. It is true that Van Texel was an expert in the water; but his strength had been so exhausted by

long weeks of constant warfare, watching, and starvation that he was not in his normal condition.

Gradually the truth dawned upon him that he was fast losing control of his limbs. At first he lost all feeling in them; then it was only by exercising the full power of his will that he could urge them to their functions; at last they refused to act altogether, and he began to sink.

In this helpless condition he had just sense enough remaining to turn upon his back and float.

"I am lost," he thought, with terror in his heart. "It will be impossible for me to swim this fearful pond, for my strength is fast departing. Oh, that I might rest here for hours!"

This thought of rest possessed him more and more. At times he was almost resolved to give up the struggle altogether, and to sink down beneath the waves to peace and death. Then, surrounded by night, black water and floating corpses, delirium seized him. Visions began to pass before his eyes.

Now he was leading a desperate sortie against the besiegers of Leyden. He was fighting over again the battle of the day before. The Spaniards were advancing to the city's ramparts in serried columns; they were bridging the moat, scaling the walls, and driving back the heroic defenders before their impetuous onset.

Fighting desperately in the thickest of the *mélee*, he realizes that the city must fall unless a miracle interposes on its behalf. Suddenly a ragged multitude appears upon the ramparts. They advance, brandishing a thousand improvised weapons above their heads, and fall upon the besiegers with incredible fury. The Spaniards are checked in the moment of victory. If the reinforcements already coming to their aid can be cut off the city may be saved.

He calls around him the mounted squadron of the Burghier Guards, leads them to a gate in the wall, and, riding at their head, scurries madly across the plain toward the advancing columns of the foe. Striking the line in the middle, he scatters death and confusion around. The Spaniards break, turn, flee, while he and his gallant troopers pursue them into the lake, where hundreds perish in the water.

"What is this?"

He is aroused from his vision by something pushing against his side. He looks around and cries aloud in terror; for the something is a dead man, floating near him cheek by jowl.

Turning upon his breast he strikes out vigorously and soon escapes the companionship of the corpse. Contact with it has sent the blood coursing through his veins, and, for a time, his strength returns. But he has not proceeded far before his limbs grow weak and powerless, and he is again obliged to float. Once more he is beset by visions, but this time they are of a different nature.

He is a page in the establishment of the great John Van der Does, Seigneur of Nordwyck, a poet, scholar, soldier. A page, but a favored one, as his father and the proud seigneur are dear friends. Therefore, it is not strange

that he and the lovely Jacqueline should be sitting together in the garden of the palace, one summer morning, perusing a legendary romance.

Suddenly he raises his eyes to her beautiful face, dimpling and glowing with smiles and blushes, and reveals the love that she has inspired in his heart. She listens to him kindly, and there, with the blue sky above them and the color and odor of flowers around, they plight their troth.

The scene shifts.

The visionary now sees before him a proud and angry father, enraged that one as lowly as he should presume to the hand of his daughter. For five long years the lovers have kept their secret, waiting for the young man to win wealth and renown, before making it known to the world. But now, besieged in famished Leyden, with death hovering over them and no hope of succor in view, the young man deems it time to confide in his sweetheart's father.

He has not achieved wealth, it is true, but he has gained fame as a doughty warrior. Surely it is not presumptuous for the captain of the Burgher Guards to ask of the commandant of Leyden the hand of his daughter? So he goes to the commandant's dwelling, with hope in his heart, and requests to see him alone. The interview takes place in an anteroom. The illustrious Seigneur of Nordwyck listens to the suit of his former page in silence, and, when he has finished, flies into a rage. Thrusting him out at the door, he forbids him ever to enter his home again.

The scene shifts for the third time.

Van Texel now dreams that he is standing on the platform of Hengist's Tower in the beleaguered city, imploring Jacqueline to grant him one gleam of hope. As she sits there, listening to his impassioned words, she appears more ravishingly beautiful than ever. Certainly he loves her better now than ever before.

She listens to him coldly, and then bids him leave her. It is her father's wish that they should part, she says, and she will never rebel against his will. At that moment a cannon booms from the ramparts, and the young man hurries away, with despair in his heart, to seek death on the field of battle.

Van Texel awakes from his trance. Tangled reeds have aroused him. His visions disappear; consciousness returns, and he looks around to find himself floating among the rushes on the margin of the lake. During his delirium the current, flowing from the middle of the mere toward the canal, has borne him onward to the shore.

"Where am I?"

As this question passes through his mind his feet sink down and come in contact with the bottom. He rises up and takes a hurried survey of his surroundings. The day is beginning to break. Is it possible that the entire night has passed while he has been dreaming?

It is hard for him to believe it, yet it must be so, as the sky is brightening more and more with the light of dawn.

"Where am I?" he asked himself again, and again he looked anxiously around.

To the north, across the mere, rose the walls of Leyden. Above them

appeared the embrasured parapets of Hengist's Tower, and the spires of churches outlined against the glowing sky. To the south and east extended a vast flowering plain, intersected by canals, sprinkled with groups of poplars and elders, and dotted with red tiled farmhouses, with high peaked roofs crowned by capacious chimneys.

Here and there along the dikes could be seen the whirling wings of wind-mills, and, in the broader waterways, the slanting sails of fishing boats hastening toward the sea.

Such was the distant prospect. Nearer—so near in fact that the sight filled him with alarm—rose the grim battlements and intrenchments of the Spaniards extending in an unbroken line, to the right and left, as far as the eye could see. Lines of sentinels were pacing back and forth before the works, while every road and dike that passed through them was patrolled by a troop of cavalry.

On finding himself so near his enemies Van Texel dropped down quickly out of sight among the rushes. Weak with exhaustion, shivering with cold and famished with hunger, he felt that he had reached the limit of his endurance. If he could not find a place to rest and food to eat soon, he realized that he must perish. Yet how could he hope to find either within sight of the Spanish camp.

Making his way cautiously out of the water, he sank down among the reeds and gave way to a passion of despair.

Suddenly he was aroused by the sound of voices, and the grating of oars in rowlocks.

Peering out of his hiding place he observed that a boat was slowly approaching him. A Spanish soldier sat amidships rowing, while another was standing in the bow, beating the reeds with a long pole that he held in his hand.

"It is useless searching the rushes for the rascals," remarked the oarsman petulently. "The thieving knaves would never have sought refuge so near the works."

"True; but we were ordered to this duty and must therefore perform it," replied the other.

"But I know for a fact that they made off toward Rotterdam."

"Nevertheless I shall perform my duty. The knaves were seen robbing the dead on the battlefield, and where could there be a more likely place for them to hide than among these rushes?"

"Well, have it your own way," answered the oarsman; "yet I repeat they were seen running toward Rotterdam."

By this time the boat had approached close to Van Texel's hiding place, so that, as the soldier struck among the reeds with his pole, the water splashed over him.

In another instant he would be discovered.

Quick as thought he flung himself upon his back, close to the water, and opened his eyes to the sky in a fixed, inanimate stare. Scarcely had he done so, when the reeds parted, and a hoarse voice was heard to cry out:

"By the devil's horns! here is another corpse. The lake is full of them."

Van Texel held his breath and prayed inwardly. Fortunate for him that exhaustion and exposure had rendered his countenance blue and death-like.

There was a short period of silence; then the hoarse voice broke out again.

"By our faith! but this body is garbed like a rascally burgher. Ugh!"

This contemptuous exclamation was accompanied by a violent thrust of the pole against the ribs of the supposed corpse. Van Texel had great difficulty in restraining a scream of agony, for the blow almost crushed in his side.

For a moment the sky grew black above him, and his senses swam. When he recovered consciousness the boat had passed on.

Suddenly the young man lifted himself upon his knees, and, raising his clasped hands to Heaven, poured out his soul in thanksgiving.

God had inspired him with an idea.

CHAPTER VII.—IN STRANGE COMPANIONSHIP.

"It is a desperate venture," Van Texel mused, as he crouched down among the reeds, "but still it must be attempted. Indeed, there is no other possible way of passing through the Spanish lines. As the soldier stated just now, the mere is full of floating corpses—the bodies of those who were slain in the battle two days ago. It is true that these corpses are mostly those of Spanish arquebusiers, who, fighting at long range, wore no armor. Yet I know of a certainty that many of the Burgher Guards perished in the lake also. They wore no cuirasses to weigh them down, and those who fell into the water dead would likely be floating with their enemies. Therefore it would excite no suspicion on the part of the Spaniards if they should see the body of an honest burgher floating among those of their dead comrades.

"Now I have observed," he reflected further, "that there is a strong current flowing from the mere into the canal that leads through the Spanish camp to the sea. There can be no doubt that this tide will carry many of the bodies into the waterway, and so past the Spanish intrenchments to the country beyond. I have already played the rôle of a dead man with success; why not attempt it again? Why not endeavor to reach the current and float safely past the pickets and patrols of the enemy in company with the dead?"

This project had no sooner taken definite form in his mind than he proceeded to put it into execution. True, he realized that it would be safer for him to wait until the following night before starting on his voyage; but he dared not risk remaining where he was through the day. Again, if he was compelled to go without food for so many hours, it was not likely that he would have sufficient strength for the undertaking.

It was evident that the venture must be put in execution at once, or not at all. But how was he to reach the current? How was he to arrive at the canal which seemed his only channel to salvation?

Slowly and cautiously he lifted his head above the reeds and made a careful examination of his surroundings. A moment afterwards he gave vent to a suppressed cry of joy; for, not fifty yards off, he perceived a belt of clear water that broke the continuity of the rushes and marked the entrance to the waterway.

Getting down on all fours, he began to crawl slowly toward it, keeping under cover of the reeds. Their tops swayed and rustled as he pushed them aside, and this rendered him fearful lest his enemies on the embankment above might notice the unusual movement, and come down to investigate the cause of it.

At last he reached his goal, and, as he peered out upon the water, was overjoyed to observe that the current was running into the canal with great velocity. Moreover, a floating body was being rapidly borne into the mouth of the funnel on the bosom of the tide.

"Oh, if I could only reach the middle of the stream without being observed!" he thought.

He immediately set his wits to work to devise a means to accomplish this end.

To enter the water and strike out boldly for the current was out of the question; for it would be impossible for him to leave the protecting shelter of the rushes without attracting the attention of the sentinels who mounted guard on the dikes of the canal.

But was it necessary for him to proceed to the desired position in this manner?

No. He could find some deep spot where he could enter the lake under water and swim beneath the surface to the middle of the tide. With this idea in view he moved along the shore until he reached a place where it shelved down abruptly into the mere. Then, after stringing grass through his hair, and besmudging his face and clothes with slime, he sank beneath the water with such a gliding, snake-like movement that scarce a ripple disturbed its surface to attract the notice of the vigilant pickets near by.

It has been remarked that Maurice was an expert swimmer; but never before had he been called upon to exercise the skill that was now demanded. It was a simple matter for him to swim under water for the required distance; but to appear suddenly from the depths in a place where no body had been observed before, and afterwards to play the part of a drowned man were feats only possible with an artist.

Behold him gliding far beneath the surface like a frog, employing his arms and legs with rare precision, and keeping careful count of every stroke! Well has he calculated the number of yards he has to swim, and well does he know how many strokes are necessary for the task.

At length he reaches the end of his submarine journey and prepares to rise once more to light and air. He stands upright in the water, strikes out once with his legs and begins to ascend. Gradually the element grows from dark to yellow green; the pressure on his ears becomes less and less. At last the obscurity around him disappears suddenly and his head pops into day.

One long, gasping breath, and he sinks back limp and motionless upon the hurrying stream.

"Didst mark that, comrade?"

"Nay! What?"

"Why a corpse just popped above the surface."

"Thou must be dreaming, comrade. Where?"

"Out yonder, where the current hurries its course to pour into the waterway."

This conversation between two of the Spanish pickets reached Van Texel's ears as he floated toward the canal. It indicated plainly that watchful eyes were upon him, and that any careless act on his part would prove fatal.

Casting a quick, searching glance around, he observed that several bodies were being borne rapidly toward him by the tide. If he could delay his progress until they floated nearer, he could enter the waterway in their company, and so escape the particular observation that a single corpse might attract. Accordingly, he allowed his hands to sink out of sight, and paddled with them in a backward direction until the bodies came up with him.

And now this ghastly fleet has entered the canal to be hurried swiftly along between the massive dikes that form its banks. Four dead bodies and one living one; four Spaniards and one Dutch burgher—surely it is a strange companionship!

So at least it appears to the pickets on the dikes; for they remark upon the incongruity with a sneer.

"Look, Pedro! that Dutch heretic is in gallant company at last. Death has given him gentlemen for comrades."

"But shall we stand idly here, and see our friends float down to the sea with the lout? Come, let us rescue them from the water and give them Christian burial."

"I'll willingly lend a hand at that task, Pedro."

With these words the two pickets hurry along the dike to procure means for the recovery of the bodies. This was a contingency for which Van Texel was wholly unprepared. It had not occurred to him that the corpses would be rescued from the canal on their way through the Spanish camp, or he would never have embarked on this adventure.

Hope died within his breast. It was evidently not the will of God that he should succeed in accomplishing his mission, he thought, and naught was left him but resignation to his fate.

Presently he heard the splashing of oars, and the sound of voices, and knew that the Spaniards were coming in a boat to recover the floating corpses of their comrades. Nearer and nearer they came until at last one of the oars brushed against his shoulder, and he realized that his enemies were at hand.

A thousand desperate projects passed like lightning flashes through his mind.

Should he abandon dissembling and surrender? Should he spring into the boat and, taking his enemies unawares, slay them with his dagger? Or should he continue to play the drowned man and let events take their course?

While he was in doubt what to do, a commotion on the dike determined him to adopt the last alternative.

Hundreds of Spanish soldiers had gathered there to witness the recovery of the bodies. Their voices were raised in cries of grief, groans, sobs and threats of vengeance.

"Alas, our poor comrades! our noble, chivalrous friends! How pitiful it is to see ye floating there like so much carrion! Bring them ashore, brave lads, that we may honor them with Christian burial."

And then—

"But look; there floats the corpse of a heretic. Behold, how he stares at the sky as if imploring God to have mercy on his crimson soul! Rebel, murderer! How dares he show his carcass here!"

These imprecations were accompanied by a volley of missiles. Stones, clods of earth, sticks, and scraps of iron, lashed the water around Van Texel into foam. Death stared him in the face; yet he did not allow an eyelid to quiver, nor a muscle of his set features to twitch. He was bruised and cut in many places; but let not a groan escape him.

"I will bear all patiently," he thought, "if they will only regard me as a corpse."

In the mean time the bodies of the Spaniards had been taken from the water, and the rescuers now had time to turn their attention to him. He could hear them rowing slowly toward him, and his last remaining hope had departed, when a soldier cried out from the bank:

"What, comrades, would ye soil your hands with that carrion? Let him float down to the sea to provide food for the sharks."

By this time the boat was within a few feet of the supposed corpse.

"You are right," returned one of its occupants. "We'll not foul our hands with him."

With these words he struck his oar violently into Van Texel's stomach and pushed him deep down beneath the water. This gave the latter an opportunity to resort to a stratagem, which he would have put in execution before had he dared.

No sooner did he find himself below the surface than he resolved to stay there, until he could at least swim with the current for a sufficient distance to be beyond the reach of the missiles of his enemies. Turning over upon his breast, therefore, he began to swim with all his strength, nor did he rise to the surface until he was compelled to do so for lack of breath.

"The Spaniards will probably think that I was caught by an undercurrent when I sank and carried thither," he reasoned, as he again assumed the semblance of a drowned man.

Whatever his enemies may have thought upon the subject they had a more important matter to engage their attention now; for casting a quick glance behind, Van Texel saw them bearing the bodies of their dead comrades in mournful procession along the dike. Fortunately they were not coming his direction, and he had time to prepare against new dangers.

It chanced, however, that his perils were over for the present. He had passed through the picket lines of the besieging army, and was fast leaving their encampment behind. Indeed, owing to the great length of their defences, they were of necessity not very deep; and, after floating through the canal for another quarter of a mile, he found himself clear of their intrenchments.

Then he paddled wearily to the bank, and crawling cautiously across the

dike, concealed himself in a clump of dwarf willows, to recover from his exhaustion.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE "BEGGARS OF THE SEA."

IN this secluded covert, within bow shot of the Spanish camp, Van Texel slept for hours. The sun mounted to the zenith and slowly sank into the west; twilight descended and gradually deepened over the plain; one by one the stars began to appear; yet the weary man slumbered on. It was not until night had completely enveloped the earth that he at last awoke.

Rubbing his eyes he endeavored to arise from the ground; but the effort was accompanied by so much pain that he sank back weak and trembling.

"It is useless," he moaned. "My strength has left me, and I can go no further. I will lie down here and die."

But presently the pangs of hunger assailed him and inspired him with the energy of despair.

"Food! I must have food!" he muttered wildly; "even if I have to go to the Spanish camp for it."

With this idea possessing his weakened brain, he rose upon his tottering legs and started for the enemy's intrenchments; but he had not gone ten paces before recovering control of his will.

Would it not be cowardly to surrender, now that he had passed through the worst perils of his mission? Had he a right to consider his own sufferings when thousands of his countrymen were depending upon him for succor? If he was dying of hunger, so were they.

"Far better it is that one should perish than many," he reflected.

So, turning his face resolutely from the glimmering lights of the Spanish campfires, he pressed on toward distant Rotterdam.

He had not gone far, however, when the sound of hoof beats ahead warned him that he was not yet beyond the reach of the enemy's patrols. It was evident that the canal was still his only road to safety, and, with a despairing groan, he dropped from the embankment into the dark and icy water. Too weak to swim, he turned over on his back and let the current bear him on.

He was barely afloat when a squad of Spanish troopers rode by along the dike, conversing cheerfully as they hastened toward the camp, where rest and refreshment were awaiting them. Van Texel saw their shadowy outlines waver against the sky as they cantered on into the gloom.

A short time afterwards a *treckschuyt* glided past him, so near that he could almost touch its dark side with his hand. It was proceeding slowly against the current, under a great bow shaped sail, with a cargo of provisions evidently intended for the Spaniards. Fortunately the drowsy skipper did not see him as he floated by.

An hour passed, and then Van Texel noticed that the current was no longer setting down the stream. At first he observed a slackness in the water, and then that he was drifting backward in his course. It was apparent that the tide was flowing in from the sea, and that he must perform the balance of his journey on dry land.

Swimming toward the embankment, he was in the act of climbing it when he saw a strange looking craft creeping stealthily up the waterway. It was not a *treckschuyt*, nor yet a fishing vessel, for its hull rested low in the water and had a piratical appearance.

He sank up to his neck in the stream and awaited its approach.

As it drew nearer he observed that it was filled from stem to stern with men, some plying the oars with skill and silence, others hanging over the gunwales, and one colossus in the bow standing upright. They neither moved nor spoke, as the strange craft glided on without the murmur of a ripple from its bows.

Suddenly the moon rose above the embankment and illumined the waterway with its silvery beams. Then Van Texel beheld a sight that filled his heart with joy; for he recognized in the men who composed that mysterious ship's company the "Beggars of the Sea"—the hardy followers of William van Lumey, Duke of Mark, admiral to the Prince of Orange.

It is true that they were wild and licentious corsairs, who, in the name of freedom, plundered, murdered, burned whenever the opportunity offered; yet he realized that they would not hesitate to assist him. So, placing his hands to his mouth, he threw out his voice over the water in a suppressed cry.

"Long live the Duke of Mark! Long live the Water Beggars!"

The giant in the bow turned quickly toward him.

"Who goes there?" he whispered sternly.

"A messenger from the burgomaster of Leyden. For God's sake grant me aid!"

This announcement was followed by a murmur of astonishment from the crew, which was quickly checked by their commander.

"Silence!" he hissed fiercely. "Wouldst betray our presence to the enemy?"

Then he gave a signal to the rowers, and the boat swung slowly around, heading for the bank to which Van Texel clung, shivering and exhausted. When it arrived near him, he swam toward it and climbed on board, to fall fainting into the arms of his rescuers.

On recovering consciousness he found himself looking up into a scarred, ferocious face, framed in a thick mass of shaggy hair and beard, which he recognized at once as that of the captain of the vessel.

"Drink this!" exclaimed the giant in a gruff whisper, as he pressed a flask to the young man's lips. "'Tis spirits of Schiedam and will do ye good."

Maurice gulped down a few swallows of the fiery liquor and felt greatly revived. Food was then given him in sparing quantities, and, in a short time he had recovered sufficient strength to answer the questions that were put to him.

"Art from Leyden?" asked the commander in a hoarse undertone.

He answered in the affirmative.

"Then tell me, how fare the brave burghers?"

"Alas!" groaned Van Texel with a mournful shake of the head, "the poor souls cannot hold out much longer. They have reached the end of their resources."

"What! have they expended all their powder?"

"Nay, there is a plenty of that in the city."

"Have all their cannon burst? Have they used up their muskets?"

"They are not lacking in arms."

"Can it be that all their fighting men are slain?"

"Many have fallen, it is true; but there are others to take their places."

"Then why say ye they've reached the end of their resources?" asked the giant in tones of fierce impatience. "Surely if they have arms, powder, and fighting men, they've means enough for their defense."

"Nevertheless, they lack the one thing needful for men besieged in cities," was Van Texel's sorrowful comment.

"And what may that be?"

"Food."

The commander stroked his shaggy beard with his great brown hand and fell to pondering.

"A want of victuals," he said at length, "is indeed a sorry affliction for the aged and decrepit, women and young children; but it should not weaken the hearts of grown and able bodied men. We sea beggars know what hunger is, for we are famished half the time. And yet," he added, casting an admiring glance over his crew, "there is not a man among us who would say that he had come to the end of his resources, because he had no food to satisfy the cravings of his maw. When we are starving, we go to those who have food and help ourselves, even if they chance to be Spaniards."

"But if this resource were impossible—what then?" queried Maurice.

"In such a case we could only die like men."

"Which the burghers of Leyden are doing daily," responded Van Texel earnestly. "They are perishing of plague and famine on the city ramparts, their faces to their enemies, their weapons in their hands. And this they will continue to do until there is not a burgher left to man the walls. Leyden may fall, but will never surrender."

"Is that the message ye bring from the burgomaster?" asked the commander with a smile of grim approval.

"It is."

"And for whom is it intended?"

"The Prince of Orange, who promised to send us succor."

"In that case," quoth the captain of the Sea Beggars reflectively, "I think we can aid ye on your journey. In sooth, we were on our way to fetch news from Leyden when we met. It chanced most luckily, therefore, that we fell in with ye, for ye bring the very tidings we were in quest of."

With these words he commanded the rowers to alter their course, and head the boat downward toward the sea.

While they were gliding swiftly in this direction, Van Texel had an opportunity to study more closely the appearance of his strange companions.

For the most part Zealanders, whom the Spaniards had forced to seek a refuge on the sea, they led a homeless, predatory life, and were renowned far and wide, as much for their ferocity as for their nautical skill. They were never known to give or to take quarter, for they went to mortal combat only,

and had sworn to spare neither noble nor simple, neither king nor pope, should they fall into their hands. Indeed, were it not for their attachment to the Prince of Orange, and the sacred cause of liberty he represented, they would have been regarded as corsairs, for, when hard pressed, they levied tribute upon friends and foes alike.

Maurice observed that many of their faces were scarred, hacked, and otherwise hideously disfigured in the unceasing conflicts in which their lives had passed. Clad in motley rags, they wore in their caps a crescent inscribed with the legend, "Rather Turks than Papists," to show their inveterate hatred of the Spaniards and of the Catholic faith which they professed. This rendered their aspect both eccentric and terrific, and it required but a single glance at their wolfish faces to understand the dread they inspired in the breasts of their foes.

Notwithstanding that the tide was against them, the rowers bent to their task with such a will that the boat made rapid progress toward the ocean. Ere two hours had passed Van Texel could hear the roar of the surf breaking against the outer dike, and soon afterwards could distinguish the masts of a great sea going ship which rode at anchor off the shore.

"Yonder," remarked the captain, pointing toward them, "lies the flagship of the worthy Admiral Boisot, our commander. He is next in rank among us to the great Duke of Mark."

"And are we going thither?" inquired Van Texel.

"We are a part of his ship's company," was the reply.

"Then put me ashore without delay; for I must hasten on to Rotterdam."

"Nay, bide with us," returned the captain, "and ye will arrive there in good time. The admiral is only awaiting our return to set sail for that city."

While this conversation was in progress the boat passed out of the canal into the open sea, and the ship appeared in view. It was a clumsy galleon—old fashioned even for those days—with a high, square poop and an overhanging prow. Although originally built for commercial purposes, the muzzles of cannon protruding from its portholes proclaimed that it was now a ship of war, notwithstanding that the disorderly crew which thronged its decks belied its martial character.

"What! back so soon?" cried a shrill, piping voice, as the boat drew alongside and made fast to the bulwarks.

Van Texel raised his eyes to the deck, and saw a fat little man looking down into the boat with an expression of astonishment upon his red, moon face. He wore the plumed, velvet cap of a cavalier, the doublet of a burgher and the leather breeches and homespun hose of a peasant. Trailing at his side was a richly embossed scabbard containing a great, gold hilted sword, and what added still further to the grotesqueness of his appearance was the fact that he wore no shoes.

"What! back so soon?" this little man repeated with an authoritative air.

"Yes, admiral, we have returned," answered the captain of the boat, as he clambered over the ship's side and saluted his superior.

"But surely ye cannot have performed your errand?" cried the admiral incredulously.

"We did not," returned the captain, "because there was no need to risk our lives on the venture. We fell in with a messenger from Leyden, who——"

"A messenger from Leyden?" interrupted the admiral excitedly. "Bring him aft to my cabin, where I may confer with him in private."

With these words the little man turned on his heel, and elbowed his way across the crowded deck to the companionway leading to his quarters.

CHAPTER IX.—A DESPERATE ALTERNATIVE.

ADMIRAL BOISOT listened to Van Texel's story with deep interest, and at its conclusion, returned to the deck and issued orders to weigh anchor and set sail at once for Rotterdam.

The crew obeyed his command with such alacrity that in an incredibly short time the ship was plowing through the water on its way to the famous seaport. During the short voyage Van Texel amused himself by mixing with the Sea Beggars and studying their wild and uncouth ways.

A more disorderly, undisciplined crew of ruffians never trod deck of a vessel. They acknowledged no authority save that of the admiral, and this only because, despite the insignificance of his person, he was a man of resolute will, who punished the slightest act of disobedience with instant death. They passed their time in drinking, quarreling and gaming, and, but for the interference of Boisot in their frequent brawls, many would have been murdered before Rotterdam was reached.

It was shortly before sunrise when they started on the voyage down the coast, and at noon they entered the mouth of the Meuse. Making their way slowly up the river, they arrived at their destination early in the afternoon, and entered the city by way of a broad canal, flanked by trees on one side and toppling houses on the other.

Here they were obliged to lower sail, and tow the ship into a basin where a number of large vessels were lying.

Although the day was far spent when Maurice disembarked to carry his message to the prince, the streets presented a scene of wonderful animation. The broad canals that ran through them were filled with ships unloading and taking on cargo; droves of cattle were crossing the bridges; bridges were rising in the air, or opening in the middle, to allow boats to pass through, and were scarcely lowered or closed again before they were inundated by throngs of people, who had been awaiting an opportunity to cross the thoroughfare.

All this moving life was reflected in the water of the canals—people, waving trees, the masts and spars of ships, the fantastic façades of the houses, were mirrored with every detail of form and color, as if the city were admiring its own beauty in a glass.

As the messenger passed on his way, many of the burghers turned to gaze after him with pity and amazement; for he presented a frightful appearance. Gaunt as a specter, his face cut and bruised, his eyes burning with feverish light, his tangled hair and beard falling over his shoulders and chest in wild disorder, barefooted and but partly clad in tattered rags—he was indeed an object to excite compassionate curiosity.

"Who is that man? Where did he come from? Whither is he going?" the burghers asked of one another as he tottered by them.

But none could give an answer.

At last he reached the residence of the prince. A sentinel was pacing back and forth before the door, and, as he turned toward it, stepped before him, crying:

"Not so fast, Sir Mendicant! Pass on and seek charity elsewhere."

To which Maurice replied in a tone of authority:

"I have business with you master, the prince. Stand aside and let me enter!"

"Business with the prince, indeed!" cried the sentinel, pricking him with his pike. "Aye, doubtless to bury a poinard in his heart. Begone, assassin, or I'll let daylight through your carcass!"

At this juncture the door of the residence opened, and a tall, stately man descended the steps of the portico, accompanied by a retinue of cavaliers. His finely shaped head was set off by an enormous fluted ruff that encircled his throat. A peaked beard adorned his thin, grave face, and his eyes had a melancholy expression. He had the air of a man accustomed to command, yet rather through confidence and affection, than fear.

On reaching the spot where Maurice and the sentinel were having their altercation, he tapped the latter lightly on the shoulder and asked:

"Why are you threatening that poor fellow?"

At the sound of his voice, the sentinel faced about, and, doffing his cap, saluted him with a sweeping bow.

"I am here to protect the life of your highness," he answered humbly, "against the assassins that are known to be seeking it. This impudent knave has been trying to force his way into your presence, and, as he will take no denial, I have been obliged to oppose him with force."

Van Texel now realized that he was standing in the presence of no less a personage than the great Prince of Orange himself, so he cried out in an imploring tone:

"I entreat your highness to receive me; for I am the bearer of tidings from Leyden."

The pale face of the prince flushed with sudden interest. Turning toward Van Texel, and fixing upon him a keen, penetrating look:

"Your name, sir?" he demanded.

"Maurice Van Texel, captain of the Burgher Guards of Leyden," was the firm reply.

"Your credentials?"

Maurice was in the act of showing him the burgomaster's ring, when the admiral of the Sea Beggars suddenly appeared upon the scene.

"Ye need harbor no doubts regarding this gallant soldier," he cried, making his way to the side of the prince. "He is indeed what he represents himself to be—a messenger from the burgomaster of Leyden. A party of my men on their way to that city for news fell in with him and brought him to me. I have questioned him, and I assure ye that the tidings he brings are of vast import to the States."

While Boisot was making this explanation, the prince was examining the ring, and, finding that the signet was really that of the worthy Van der Werf, he now turned to the cavaliers who accompanied him, and said:

"Gentlemen, we will return to our residence. And you, my brave fellow," he added addressing himself to Maurice, "will be kind enough to accompany the admiral and myself to my cabinet, where we will consider the matter you have to lay before us."

With these words he took Boisot familiarly by the arm and led the way back into the mansion.

On reaching his cabinet, the prince threw himself into an armchair, and requested his companions to be seated. Then, turning to Van Texel:

"You may now begin your story," he said.

In earnest, passionate tones, rendered doubly impressive by his own emaciated appearance, Maurice described all he had witnessed of the sufferings of the citizens of Leyden. He told of their heroic endurance of privations; of their courage and constancy in the face of danger, and of their inflexible resolve never to surrender the city to the Spaniards while a man remained alive to defend the walls. He concluded by making an eloquent appeal to the prince to send them the deliverance he had promised.

"I implore your highness," he cried, "to send them aid at once, else they will perish of plague and famine. If you only realized how they trusted you. If you could only see them, day after day, mounting the walls, the steeples and towers to strain their eyes anxiously over the plain on the watch for your expected coming. They rely upon you, most gracious prince, as on a rock of adamant, and surely you will not disappoint them. You will send them the assistance you promised before it is too late. Not a week, nor a fortnight hence, but now; for consider that I come as their accredited messenger to inform you that the end is near."

During this impassioned harangue William the Silent sat as motionless as a statue, while the tears slowly coursed down his face. But when Maurice had finished speaking, he turned his eyes upon him with a look of unutterable despair, and cried out in an agonized tone:

"Alas! I can do nothing. I am without the vestige of an army."

A profound silence followed this announcement. It seemed as if the last hope had departed from the breasts of the three men engaged in that momentous conference. At last Van Texel found voice to say:

"Then Leyden is doomed."

"Aye, and all Holland as well," muttered the prince in sepulchral tones.

At this point the piping voice of the admiral suggested regretfully:

"Now, if Leyden were only on the sea, I'd engage to raise the siege with my brave beggars. But it's an inland town, so there's an end of it."

"Thank you for the intention, Boisot!" said the prince with a sad smile. "But I doubt if you could accomplish much in any case with the handful of men at your disposal."

"A handful, say ye!" cried the little admiral, suddenly bristling with importance. "A handful indeed! Why mark ye, prince, within a week's time I could place eight hundred seasoned Zealanders at your disposal."

The prince turned toward him with renewed hope, and asked :

"Are you in earnest, Boisot? Could you really raise me such a force within a week?"

"Aye, and more if necessary," replied the little man boastfully.

"Then may God be praised!" cried the prince. "We will not despair of Leyden yet."

"But these Zealanders are sea fighters," added Boisot doubtfully, fearing that his assurances might have inspired too great a hope in his master. "I doubt if they could be persuaded to go to battle on dry land."

"Nor will they be required to do so," returned the prince with an amused smile. "Get me the men, admiral, and I promise you that they can fight the Spaniards on the water."

"What!" exclaimed the other incredulously, "do ye propose to fetch Leyden to the sea?"

"No, but to send the sea to Leyden," was the calm reply.

"Do you mean that you will break down the dikes?" asked Maurice in astonishment.

William the Silent bowed his head in assent.

"And flood the richest lowlands in all Holland?" cried the horrified Boisot.

"Better a drowned land than a lost land," answered the prince impressively.

CHAPTER X.—THE OCEAN TO THE RESCUE.

IN determining to send the ocean to the assistance of the beleaguered city, William the Silent was not following out his own arbitrary will; for the estates of Holland had long considered the advisability of the measure, realizing that no other course could rescue Leyden, and with it the whole country from the Spaniards.

Indeed, the patriots had prepared for the event with as much enthusiasm as if it had been a profitable undertaking. Bonds had been issued and a capital subscribed to defray the necessary expenses, while the ladies of the land had contributed their plate, jewelry and costly furniture for the relief of those who would lose their all in the flood.

In order to fully understand the practicability of the proposed scheme, it should be remembered that this portion of Holland lies below the level of the ocean, from which it is protected by immense dikes. By making gaps in the sea walls, therefore, the entire territory could be restored to the dominion of the waves.

Everything was in readiness for the carrying out of the project, excepting an army to coöperate with the ocean, when Admiral Boisot offered the services of his brave Zealanders to the prince. We have seen with what eagerness the latter accepted; for, although the force to be placed at his disposal seemed wholly inadequate to contend against ten thousand veteran Spaniards, the desperate condition of the country's affairs warranted him in resorting to a forlorn hope.

On the day following his interview with Van Texel, the prince informed the estates that the time had arrived to put their project in execution. He likewise despatched messengers to the inhabitants of the condemned district, warning them to abandon their homes. Then, on the 3d of August, accompanied by Paul Buys, chief of the commission appointed to execute the enterprise, he went in person along the Yssel, as far as Kappelle, and superintended the rupture of the dikes in sixteen places. The flood gates at Schiedam and Rotterdam were also opened, and the ocean began to pour over the land.

In the mean time Admiral Boisot had departed to collect the force of Zea-



"WE EXPECT GREAT RESULTS FROM THE ARK OF DELFT."

landers he had promised, nor had he much difficulty in performing his errand; for the Sea Beggars invested every swamp and inlet of the seacoast in predatory bands. On the day after his departure the first detachment arrived in Rotterdam, and were greeted by the inhabitants with demonstrations of joy. During the week that followed they came pouring into the city from every direction, and resorted immediately to the taverns to disturb the peaceful burghers with their wild carousing.

While waiting for the waters to rise, the prince busied himself in collecting provisions in all the principal towns of the neighborhood, and in gathering a fleet of boats to convey them to famished Leyden along with the ships of war. Every quay and shipyard resounded with the noise of hammers, and the shouts of workmen preparing this unique armada for its voyage.

Since his arrival in Rotterdam Van Texel had remained the guest of

William the Silent, and frequently accompanied the prince on his rounds of inspection. While riding past a shipyard one afternoon, his attention was attracted to an enormous, flat bottomed vessel, to which the workmen were putting the finishing touches. Its decks were protected by immense bulwarks, and a contrivance like the great arms of a windmill protruding from both of its sides. Turning to the prince, he asked :

“Is that one of the war ships?”

“It is,” was the answer, “and we expect great results from it. It is to be christened the ‘Ark of Delft,’ and will probably serve as Admiral Boisot’s flagship.”

“But it has no masts, and seems rather too cumbersome to be propelled by oars.”

“Nor will it be,” said the prince. “Do you observe those curious engines that are attached to its sides?”

“Do you refer to those great fans of wood that resemble the arms of a windmill?”

“The same,” answered the prince. “They are called paddle wheels, and are made to revolve by the turning of a crank inside the ship. Then the fans strike the water like the blades of oars and urge the vessel onward. It is an invention of one of our shipwrights.”

“I trust it will prove a success,” said Maurice doubtfully.

“And now observe the formidable character of the vessel,” continued the other, without noticing his remark. “It is an impregnable floating fort, bristling with cannon and provided with shotproof bulwarks. The Spaniards will hardly succeed in sinking it, I think.”

On returning home that evening the prince complained of a headache, and on the following morning, when Maurice presented himself, he learned that he was confined to his bed with a violent fever. It was given out by the physicians that his highness could attend to no business that day, so the young man contented himself with wandering among the shipyards alone, watching the workmen at their tasks.

Several days passed by, and yet the prince grew no better. He lay utterly prostrate in mind and body, and, with his absence from his post of duty, the work of preparation lagged.

Never was illness more unseasonable. Maurice sought an audience with him in vain; for the physicians had decided that it was necessary for his recovery that his mind should be spared the agitation of business, and that all distressing and perplexing subjects should be removed from his thoughts.

In this emergency Van Texel paid a visit to the burgomaster, to urge him to hurry the expedition forward; but the worthy man replied that nothing could be done until the prince recovered his health. Maurice next appealed to Admiral Boisot.

“Admiral,” he said, “the water is now deep enough over the land to float your largest vessels. Why not go to the relief of Leyden at once?”

To which Boisot made answer that he would undertake no enterprise unless commanded to do so by his master.

And all this while the preparations for the deliverance of the starving city

were growing slacker and slacker, until it seemed likely that they would soon be abandoned altogether.

Poor Van Texel was in despair. It appeared to him that Leyden was irrevocably doomed, and he resolved to make his way back to the city to die with the friends he loved. But perhaps the prince might have some message to send to the hapless burghers?

In order to satisfy himself on this score, he penetrated one morning, unannounced, into the prince's bedchamber, and found him lying quite alone. Inquiring what had become of his attendants, the prince answered in a feeble voice that he had sent them all away.

"In that case," said Van Texel, "I can speak to your highness without fear of interruption. Are you strong enough to hear me?"

The prince motioned him weakly to proceed.

"I have simply this to say," went on Van Texel. "It is evident that, with your sickness, the last hope of saving Leyden has departed. While you have been lying here ill, the estates, lacking the inspiration of your presence, have grown lukewarm toward the enterprise. The work of preparing the fleet has lagged; even the brave Zealanders have lost their enthusiasm, and it is time for me to return to my friends and comrades and perish with them. Do you wish to send them any message?"

With a superhuman effort William the Silent raised himself from the bed and staggered over to a chair.

"I have been deceived!" he cried passionately. "They told me that the expedition was about to start for Leyden, and now I learn that it is almost as good as abandoned. Bring me my garments; for I must go forth and spur the work on."

Van Texel hurried to his assistance, and, while he was helping the prince into his clothes, the latter poured into his ears a torrent of burning words.

"So you are going back to Leyden?" he cried feverishly. "Good! It is nobly conceived. And you ask me for a message to the burghers? Well, tell them that they hold the destiny of Holland in their keeping. Beseech them to persevere a little longer. Assure them that the Prince of Orange has not forgotten his promise; that he has already unloosed the ocean, and will soon send a fleet to their deliverance. And now may God speed you on your journey!" he added, as, having completed his toilet, he embraced Van Texel and tottered out into the corridor.

A moment afterwards Maurice heard him shouting over the balustrade to a page in the hall below:

"Ho there! Tell my groom to bestir himself, and make ready a horse for my use."

Then, with a smile of triumph, the young man retired to his own apartment to prepare for his journey home.

CHAPTER XI.—THE RETURN.

BEFORE sunrise on the following morning, Van Texel, attired in the leather jerkin and breeches of a peasant, and with no other weapon than his

trusty poinard, made his way to a canal where a number of market boats were moored.

There he paused and submitted the different vessels to a critical scrutiny, until his gaze finally rested upon a small *treckschuyt* that had not yet unloaded its cargo of garden stuff. Its skipper—evidently a countryman—was sitting near the tiller, gazing dreamily into the sluggish water of the canal.

"Hello there!" cried Van Texel. "I would like to have a word with you, my friend."

The peasant turned upon him a pair of sleepy eyes and drawled out lazily:

"With me?"

"Yes, with you," answered Maurice; then, coming to the point at once:

"How much will you take for your *treckschuyt*, cargo and all?" he asked.

"Do you want to buy?"—this in a tone of sleepy amazement.

"I would hardly ask the question unless I did," was the impatient answer.

"Come, what will you take for your outfit?"

The peasant looked the boat and cargo over and seemed to be occupied in a profound mental calculation. At last he turned again to Van Texel and said:

"The whole might be worth twenty gulden."

"Very well," said Maurice; "I will pay you that price."

And counting out the money into the peasant's hand, he took possession of the *treckschuyt* and bade him step ashore. While the latter stood gaping on the bank, utterly bewildered by the celerity of the transaction, Van Texel set the bow shaped sail and pushed out into the canal. Then the man awoke suddenly from his stupefaction.

"Hold!" he cried. "I erred, my good sir. The whole might be worth thirty gulden."

Maurice laughed.

"Rest content with your bargain, friend!" he called back over the water.

"I have paid you twice the value of your boat."

A short time afterwards he passed out through one of the water gates of the city and entered the Meuse. Proceeding down the river for a short distance, he arrived presently at one of the flood gates in the great Boompjes dike, which the Prince of Orange had opened to admit the ocean over the land. The water was pouring through it in a torrent, but this did not deter him from attempting its passage.

Lowering sail, and heading for the center of the raging current, he braced himself for the plunge. As the boat neared the narrow funnel, it moved faster and faster, until it was caught in an avalanche of water and literally hurled through the foaming rapids to the inundated region beyond.

"It will be clear sailing now until I arrive at the Spanish camp," he mused as he hauled up the canvas. "Then I will have to trust to my wits to pass their lines in safety."

It was his intention to proceed direct to the camp of the enemy, in the character of a peasant having a boatload of provisions to sell to the soldiers, and, while bargaining from cantonment to cantonment, to keep alert for an opportunity to slip by their pickets unobserved. It was not unusual for the

peasants of the neighborhood to supply the needs of the Spaniards in this way, and Van Texel had no fear of being recognized in the disguise he had assumed. So it was with a feeling of confidence that he resumed his place at the tiller, and headed the *treckschuyt* for Leyden.

The wind was blowing fair from the south, and the little craft sped before it over water that was comparatively calm. It was passing over the verdant stretch of lowlands that shortly before extended all the way from Rotterdam to the beleaguered city, and the heart of Van Texel ached as he viewed the devastation that had fallen upon that fruitful region.

As he was borne farther into the interior of the country, he passed the wrecked towers of windmills, steeples that rose above the green expanse like obelisks marking the graves of buried hamlets, and tree tops that swayed mournfully in the breeze. Here and there the roof or the chimney of a farmhouse protruding out of the flood, presenting a picture of utter desolation.

"Oh, what could be more terrible!" exclaimed the wretched young man, overcome by the horror of the scene. Then the words of the prince recurred to him—"Better a drowned land than a lost land"—and he recovered from his momentary despair.

A little after midday the redoubts and intrenchments of the Spaniards loomed above the horizon, and he was aroused to active thought.

How did it happen that these works had been spared by the flood?

This question was answered a short time afterwards when the great Landscheiding dike appeared in view. Van Texel now remembered that the city was surrounded by a series of immense embankments, one within the other, by which it was defended against its ancient enemy, the ocean, precisely like the circumvallations by means of which it was now assailed by its more recent enemy, the Spaniard. And, moreover, it was upon these very ramparts that the Spaniard had erected his forts.

Van Texel's heart sank within him.

"Leyden is lost!" he cried despairingly. "Her own defenses against the sea have proved her ruin, for they have furnished a safe refuge to her enemies."

Nevertheless, he did not abandon his purpose of returning to the city, but kept the *treckschuyt* steadily to her course.

In half an hour he arrived within hailing distance of the Landscheiding, and was forthwith challenged by a sentinel.

"Stand off! or we'll greet ye with a shot."

Bringing the *treckschuyt* up into the wind, Maurice made answer:

"I am a marketman with provisions for the soldiers."

"If that be so, ye may approach," returned the sentinel.

And Van Texel steered again for the embankment.

Scarcely had he made fast to the dike when he was surrounded by a crowd of clamoring soldiers, all eager to bargain for his produce; for, since the flooding of the neighboring country, no market boats had visited the camp. Spaniards, Wolloons, Germans, jostled one another in their anxiety to buy, until Van Texel was well nigh overwhelmed with their importunities.

"Hold!" he cried, waving them back with his hand. "So many voices confuse me. Is there not an officer here with whom I can bargain?"

Even while he was speaking the soldiers ceased their cries, and made way to the right and left for a tall, dark visaged man who had suddenly appeared round the corner of a bastion.

"What is the meaning of this turmoil?" he demanded, casting about him a glance full of authority; then, turning to an officer who stood near: "Is this the way you maintain discipline, Captain Romero?" he asked sternly.

The officer stepped forward, cap in hand, and made him the most respectful salutation.

"Seigneur Valdez," he said, "pray, allow me to explain. My men have been living on camp stores for some time past. They have become eager, therefore, for fresh food. A peasant has just arrived with a boatload of garden stuff—the first in many days—and if my men forgot themselves——"

But Seigneur Valdez did not allow him to finish.

"A market boat arrived?" he interrupted anxiously. "And from whence may I ask?"

"Ah, that I have not learned," replied the captain.

"What! did you not question the owner of the boat?" asked Valdez in surprise. "Then how know you that he is not a spy of the rebels?"

"Peasants have brought us provisions many times before, and yet have not betrayed us," responded Romero protestingly.

"True; but that was before the ocean flooded their fields and meadows. There is not a peasant this side of Rotterdam who has produce to sell us now. It follows, therefore, that this knave must have come here from a distance. I like not this voyage of his. Bring him to me!"

The captain turned to Van Texel, who had heard every word of the foregoing conversation in fear and trembling, and said:

"Come hither, my man, and give an account of yourself to the general!"

Now Maurice was but an indifferent romancer, and although he acted the part of a peasant tolerably enough, as he advanced with downcast face and shuffling gait, into the presence of the Spanish commander, he felt certain that he could never invent a story that would allay the suspicions he had aroused.

"From whence do you hail, fellow?" asked Valdez, in the tone that a master might employ towards his slave.

The blood of the free Hollander mounted to Van Texel's cheeks as, suppressing his indignation with an effort, he replied:

"From Gouda, your excellency."

"And is Gouda so far removed as to be beyond the reach of the flood?"

"The water has reached there, it is true," answered Maurice quickly, forgetting in his bewilderment to employ the *patois* of a peasant; "but my farm lies upon high ground above the inundated district."

Valdez regarded him through half closed eyes, and laughed silently.

"And do the peasants of Gouda all talk like courtiers?" he inquired, after a pause.

Realizing the mistake he had committed, Maurice hastened to reply:

"No, your excellency, but I was monastery bred."

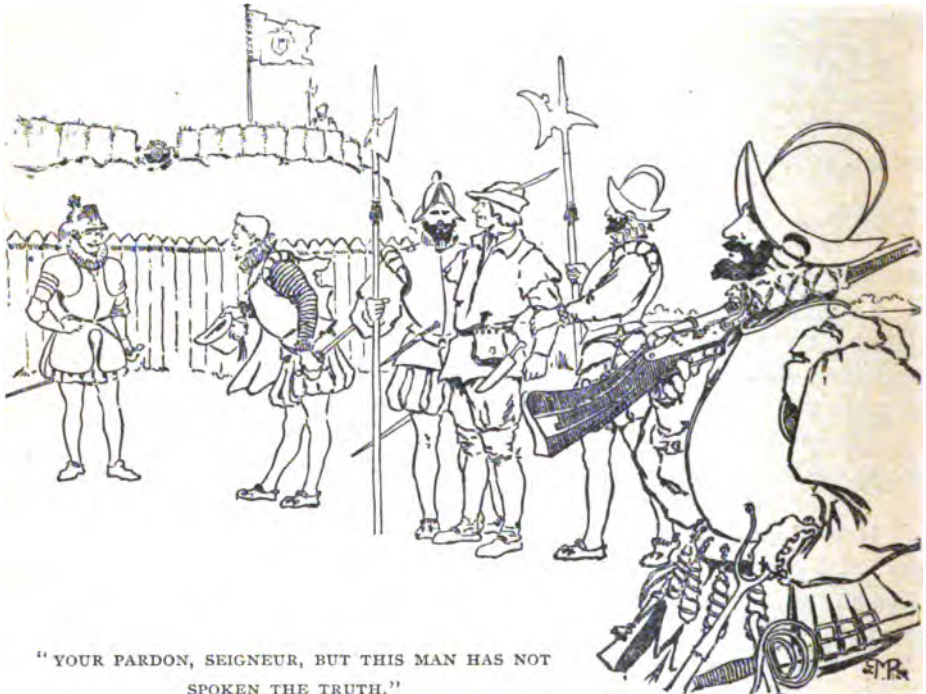
"Art then a Catholic?"

"Aye, and a loyal subject to the Spanish king as well."

In making the latter assertion he did not lie, for, at this period in their war with Spain, the Netherlanders claimed to be fighting against oppression only, and not against the sovereignty of King Philip II.

"You speak fairly, sir," said Valdez, somewhat reassured by the young man's answers. "And yet I must have still further proof of your fidelity before allowing you the freedom of the camp. It is evident that the Prince of Orange is meditating some stroke for the relief of Leyden. What say the gossips of Gouda in this regard?"

"That William the Silent well deserves his title; for he keeps his designs a secret even from his friends," replied Van Texel evasively.



"Then it is not known what he intends?"

Noticing the anxiety of the Spanish general, and wishing to augment it, Maurice made answer:

"It is said in Gouda that William the Silent is about to embark on some vast enterprise against your excellency; but as to the when, how and where all is conjecture."

Valdez stroked his pointed beard thoughtfully and frowned; then, turning to leave the cantonment:

"Your answers are satisfactory. You may go," he said with an authoritative wave of the hand.

Maurice was congratulating himself on his narrow escape from detection, when a soldier, who had been secretly examining his boat during the interview, called out to the retiring general:

"Your pardon, seigneur, but this man has not spoken the truth. He hails from Rotterdam, not from Gouda, as he claims."

Valdez wheeled quickly toward the speaker.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"'Tis so emblazoned on the *treckschuyt's* stern," was the firm, but respectful reply. "You may read there—'The Stork, of Rotterdam.'"

This announcement fell upon Van Texel like a thunderbolt. Until that moment he was unaware that the boat had any name, and now that he was called upon suddenly to invent an explanation, his wits proved unequal to the task.

But Valdez did not question him; he only turned upon him a keen, penetrating glance that seemed to fathom the deepest recesses of his soul. Then, apparently satisfied with the result of his scrutiny, he said in low, threatening tones:

"This knave is a spy. Arrest him!"

Two soldiers stepped forward at the command and laid sinewy hands upon Van Texel's shoulders; but he merely shook his herculean limbs, and they fell sprawling on the ground. Then, before their companions had time to come to their aid, he snatched up a halberd that one of them had dropped in his fall, and, bounding across the embankment, put his back to the bastion. For, realizing the tortures that would await him as a prisoner, he had resolved to die, rather than surrender to his foes.

Having recovered from their astonishment at his resistance, his enemies now rushed on him in a crowd; but he covered his front with the whirlwind of his halberd, and they fell back to a respectful distance.

"Why waste our blood on this base peasant?" they cried. "Shoot him! Shoot him!"

Several muskets were already leveled at his breast, when Captain Romero whispered in the ear of his general:

"That fellow is no peasant. He is evidently a man at arms, and I believe I recognize him."

"What! you know him?" asked Valdez with sudden interest.

"I am certain he is that terrible cavalier who led the sortie against us in July."

Valdez waited to hear no more.

"Don't shoot! Take him alive, alive!" he shouted excitedly.

And the soldiers, whose fingers were in the act of pressing triggers, dropped their muskets to the ground.

And now they began advancing toward Van Texel in a semicircle, drawing gradually nearer and nearer, until they were almost within reach of his up-lifted weapon. Then they paused and commenced a series of feigns cleverly calculated to throw him off his guard.

First one and then another would dart toward him suddenly, and as suddenly dart back again, hoping to tempt him to strike at them with his halberd, and thus afford an opportunity for the others to close in and seize him. But his merely glared at them like a stag at bay, and grasped his halberd tighter.

Suddenly the voice of Valdez shouted the command:

"Seize him!"

And then they all rushed forward. The combat was terrific. It was one against twenty, but that one a giant. For a few moments a perfect whirl of men surged and tossed about the bastion. Groans and shrieks came out of the whirl, and nothing could be distinguished but a confused mass of writhing limbs. Then the soldiers drew back, defeated, revealing the enormous figure of Van Texel surrounded by a wall of quivering bodies.

Presently three men appeared upon the top of the bastion, creeping cautiously forward on their hands and knees. They were trailing something after them, but what it was could not be distinguished from below. On reaching the point of the wall that looked down upon Van Texel, they arose to their feet, spread out the something with their hands, and, behold! it was a net.

In the mean time Valdez had gathered his soldiers together for another charge, and Maurice was so intent upon their movements that he paid no heed to what was going on above him.

All at once he heard a whirring sound, and the next instant was involved in a complexity of hempen meshes.

He struggled furiously. He tore the ropes asunder with his hands. But it was too late. Before he could get wholly free, the soldiers hurled themselves upon him in a body, and bore him to the ground.

He fought them desperately. It was in vain. The net prevented the free exercise of his tremendous strength, and, at last overpowered, he was bound hand and foot with ropes.

"To the dungeons of Lammen with him!" cried the fierce Valdez.

Van Texel sank into unconsciousness with these words ringing in his ears.

CHAPTER XII—TREASON WITHIN THE WALLS.

In the mean time gaunt famine was stalking through the streets of Leyden.

A week after the departure of the burgomaster's messenger, the last ounce of bread was doled out from the public stores, and of its substitute, malt cake, but a slender provision remained.

Apprised of this state of affairs, Valdez issued most urgent and ample offers of pardon to the citizens, if they would consent to open their gates and accept the king's authority; but, thanks to the influence of the redoubtable burgomaster, his overtures were received with silent contempt.

As day after day passed by, however, and the sufferings of the unfortunate people increased, a dull distrust succeeded to this gleam of courage, and a few royalists among the population, who were known as "Glippers," ventured to ridicule the others to their faces with the absurd vision of relief which they so resolutely entertained.

"Go up to the tower, ye beggars," was their frequent and taunting cry, "go up to the tower, and tell us if ye can see deliverance approaching."

And day after day the famished burghers did go up to the ancient tower of Hengist, with heavy hearts and anxious eyes, watching, hoping, praying, fearing, and at last almost despairing of relief by God or man.

Toward the latter part of August it was rumored abroad that there was but a four days' supply of the malt cake remaining, and after that was exhausted there was nothing left but starvation. An uprising of the citizens was threatened, when, fortunately, a courier arrived from the Prince of Orange with a letter for Adrian Van der Werf, the burgomaster, assuring him that Captain Van Texel, his messenger, had reached Rotterdam in safety with the appeal of Leyden for assistance. The prince stated further that acting upon Van Texel's representations, he had pierced all the dikes, and that the water was rising upon the Landscheiding, the great outer barrier which separated the city from the sea.

Armed with this joyful intelligence, Van der Werf proceeded to the marketplace, and publicly announced the news. Then, knowing the fondness of his countrymen for music, he ordered the city musicians to perambulate the streets, playing lively melodies and martial airs. The cannon on the ramparts roared, and, for a brief period, the starving city put on a holiday aspect, much to the astonishment of the besieging forces.

From that time on the Glippers held their tongues; yet their very silence was foreboding, as will presently appear.

It was a week after the celebration; the hour sundown; the scene the platform of Hengist's Tower. A young girl was standing there, her elbows on the railing, gazing down at a certain quarter in the town below with a perplexed and anxious expression.

Presently a cavalier emerged through the trap door of the platform and advanced towards her. At the sound of his footsteps she turned quickly round and extended her hand to him with a smile of recognition.

"Ah, Lieutenant Hasselaer, so you have come?" she said; then, as he pressed her fingers to his lips, "I trust you will not think me unmaidenly for appointing this rendezvous?" she added, blushing.

The cavalier bowed low.

"No one could harbor such a thought of Jacqueline Van der Does," he answered.

"And yet you no doubt wonder why I sent for you?"

"My lady, it is not my place to wonder, but to obey."

"I see you are a true soldier," said Jacqueline, with an approving smile, "and that you can be trusted. Therefore, I will tell you the purpose of this meeting at once. It is," she continued, becoming of a sudden very grave, "to aid me in saving Leyden from betrayal."

"Betrayal?" cried Hasselaer aghast. "What mean you?"

She led him to the platform railing, and pointed down into the streets.

"You can observe," she said in quick, eager tones, "that the citizens are out in great number this lovely evening to enjoy the air. See how dejectedly they crawl from place to place! Poor, lean specters! they cannot endure much longer. Now cast your eyes upon the entrance to yon narrow street and tell me what you see!"

Hasselaer looked in the direction indicated, and presently replied:

"I see a man, muffled in a cloak, leave the crowd and turn into the alley. And now I see another. This time it is a cavalier. And now two laborers.

Why do they pull their hat brims down and act so mysteriously? It might be supposed they were hatching a plot."

"Your powers of observation are acute, lieutenant," said Jacqueline approvingly. "The persons you have noted are indeed conspirators, or else my instincts fail me. I have seen them go down that alley in the same mysterious manner many an evening before. They are Glippers going to some place of secret meeting."

"You have seen them act thus before?"

"Ah, I see I must explain," she answered reproachfully. "Know then that ever since the gallant Captain Van Texel departed on his mission to the prince"—and here her voice grew tremulous—"I have ascended this tower morning and evening to watch for signs of his success. For I reasoned that, if he had escaped the Spaniards, succor would speedily arrive. Thus my anxiety for his safety led me to a place where I could survey, not only the distant horizon, but the streets of the city as well. So now you know," she added with glowing cheeks, "how it happens that I am acquainted with the movements of the Glippers."

"And yet," returned Hasselaer doubtfully, "they may not intend any wrong."

"Then trust to my intuition!" exclaimed the girl in impressive tones. "I feel that they are plotting treason; that they are planning the betrayal of the city. For are they not royalists, and friends to the king of Spain? When such persons assemble in secret it certainly bodes us no good."

"There is reason in what you say, my lady," returned Hasselaer, after a pause. "What would you have me to do?"

"Discover their place of meeting, and either confirm or allay my fears."

"Have you spoken of them to the commandant?"

"No; for my father is a passionate man, and might proceed to unwarrantable extremities. I must have something more definite than suspicions to reveal when I confide in him. Will you assist me in this, lieutenant?"

"To the best of my poor ability," was Hasselaer's gallant reply.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE HOUSE OF FEAR.

At sundown the next evening, Hasselaer, disguised as an artisan, proceeded to the entrance of the alley, and concealed himself in the shadow of an arched doorway to await the arrival of the Glippers.

He had not been in his hiding place long when the first of them made his appearance. This man did not enter the alley at once, but walked past it to and fro, as if undecided what course to pursue; then, casting a quick, nervous glance over his shoulder, turned into it and hurried on.

"Suspicious conduct that," muttered the watchful Hasselaer.

A short time afterwards two laborers turned into the lane, with spades upon their shoulders, and swinging lanterns in their hands. Why the lanterns?

While the lieutenant was pondering this question a cavalier came sauntering along. Beneath a velvet cloak he wore a richly embroidered doublet; a

starched ruff encircled his neck, and plumes nodded in his cap. As he drew nearer Hasselaer recognized him as Count Marinus Deuterman, a leader among the Glippers. In fact, he was the same accommodating nobleman who, in the opening chapter of this chronicle, incited the burghers to rebellion.

"If that traitor sneaks into the lane it will be a sign there is mischief afoot," muttered Hasselaer under his breath.

At the same time he made an inward resolution not to lose sight of the count until he learned what had brought him to the neighborhood.

On reaching his hiding place Deuterman paused and shot a quick glance around; then, dropping his face into the folds of his cloak, he darted into the alley. But he had not proceeded fifty paces before a shadow appeared in his wake, advancing when he advanced, and stopping when he stopped, darting into the shadows of doors and balconies when he looked behind, and emerging from cover to continue the chase when he resumed his mysterious journey.

At last the count halted at the door of a toppling house within view of the city wall, and rapped a low summons on the oaken panel. From the shelter of a portico opposite Hasselaer saw the door swing open, and caught a momentary glimpse of several shadowy figures sitting in the midst of a dimly lighted apartment. Then the scene was blotted out by the closing of the door.

"So, my sly fox," he thought, "I have discovered your rendezvous. It now remains for me to learn what business has brought you here."

With this idea in view he advanced boldly to the house and rapped upon the door. Sounds of suppressed whispering and the creaking of footsteps came to his ears; then silence reigned within.

He knocked again—this time in a more imperative manner—and, after a moment's waiting, was rewarded by hearing a quavering voice call through the keyhole:

"Who's there?"

"An honest artisan who desires a word with Count Deuterman."

"Then seek him on the Breede Straat, where he resides," answered the voice. "Ye'll not find him here."

"Save that tale for his enemies, not for his friends," quoth Hasselaer boldly. "I just saw him pass through this door."

At this juncture the count himself tiptoed to the door.

"Stand aside, Andreas, and let me parley with this fellow!" he whispered gruffly; then, raising his voice, he called to the man outside:

"State your business, my man!"

"Am I addressing Count Deuterman?" asked Hasselaer.

"Yes, and you are taxing his patience," was the reply.

"I crave pardon, my noble lord; but I have come here to render you a service."

"Speak out, then!"

"And proclaim my errand to all Leyden? Nay, my lord, for that would be doing you an injury."

"Then what would you have?" inquired the count impatiently.

"Admit me to the house, where I can confer with you in private," was the reply.

Deuterman hesitated; but reasoning that it would appear suspicious to refuse the stranger's request, he at last resolved to comply with it. There was a rattling of iron bolts, the creaking of a key in a rusty lock, and the door swung slowly open.

The apartment in which Hasselaer now found himself might well have served as the scene of a dark and violent crime. The floor was covered with slime, the walls with a damp, green mold, and the rafters of the low ceiling were festooned with the cobwebs of years.

As the windows were boarded up, the only light in the den was furnished by two smoky lamps suspended from the rafters by chains. Their dim rays illumined the haggard faces of several ragged, half starved men, who gathered round a rude plank table conversing in frightened whispers.

"Come this way," said the count, as he led Hasselaer to a seat in a corner; then, noticing the inquisitive glance which the latter bestowed upon the company, he added:

"Pay no heed to those honest fellows. They are trusty retainers of mine."

Now the lieutenant had really nothing to communicate to Count Deuterman, having advanced his plea of a service to render him as a subterfuge to gain admittance to the house. In the following conversation, therefore, he was obliged to rely on his powers of invention.

"And now," began the count, sitting down on a bench by his side, "you may reveal the nature of the service you would render me."

Hasselaer hesitated, stammered and made this evasive reply:

"You are probably aware, my lord, that you have many secret sympathizers in Leyden—people who admire your loyalty to Spain in their hearts, although they would not dare acknowledge it in public. You see before you a person of that character."

"Indeed?" replied Deuterman, with a slight elevation of his eyebrows. "Then it is strange I have not met you before. I thought I knew every royalist in the city."

"Nevertheless there are many whom you do not know because they have keep their real sentiments a secret."

"You for example," said the count half incredulously; then, wishing to shorten the conversation, "I am willing to take what you say for granted, so come to the point at once—what brought you here?"

Confronted with this direct question, Hasselaer determined upon a bold stroke, which might, at one leap, give him the information sought.

"I have come here," he answered boldly, "to place myself under your orders—to assist you in the plot you are now meditating."

These words, spoken loud enough for all in the room to hear, produced the utmost consternation. The men at the table turned toward him with terror depicted upon their blanched, haggard faces, and low mutterings of fear escaped from their trembling lips. Hasselaer needed no further proof that they were indeed engaged in a conspiracy. Notwithstanding the apprehension exhibited by his followers, Count Deuterman remained calm.

"Who told you I was meditating a plot?" he asked in a low, stern voice.

"It is sufficient that I know it," was Hasselaer's resolute reply.

The count pondered deeply for a time, and then continued:

"And you have come here to offer me your services?"

"I have."

"Well, I have determined to accept them," answered Deuterman with a grim smile. "Indeed you know too much, my fine fellow, to be allowed out of my keeping. So hereafter you will make your home here."

Then, turning to one of the men at the table:

"Conduct this man to the tunnel, and set him to work at once!" he commanded.

CHAPTER XIV.—AT WORK IN THE TUNNEL.

HASSELAER'S first impulse on realizing the trap into which he had fallen was to show fight. But a moment's reflection convinced him of the utter hopelessness of effecting his escape, and, moreover, it best suited his purposes to remain with the conspirators until he had unraveled the plot in which they were engaged.

So, when the man to whom the count had spoken arose from his seat, and beckoned him to follow, he accompanied him with well feigned readiness. The man led the way to a door communicating with a chamber in the rear, and opened it with a huge key that hung from his girdle. Then he shoved Hasselaer before him into the apartment, and having locked the door behind them, proceeded to light a lantern that was fastened to the wall.

The lieutenant could now see that he was standing in a kind of workshop. Spades, picks, and shovels were ranged against the walls; lanterns and chains hung from the rafters; and, in one corner, a quantity of wooden props and beams were piled. While he was examining these objects curiously, his companion accosted him gruffly.

"Take one of those spades and follow me!" he said.

Hasselaer selected one without delay, and accompanied his guide into a third chamber where a number of workmen were busy. By the light of the lanterns that hung around, he could see that some were carrying buckets of earth to a great storehouse in the rear, while others were laboring at a windlass that covered the mouth of a shaft leading down into the ground.

"Hold!" cried his guide to the men who were turning the crank. "I have a recruit here who has been ordered into the tunnel. Send him down with the next empty bucket."

"All right, master! There is one ready now," answered one of the workmen.

A moment afterwards Hasselaer stepped into the bucket, the arms of the windlass revolved, and he dropped rapidly to the foot of the shaft.

There he was met by a workman who had been previously apprised of his coming.

"Well, my man," said this fellow, holding a lantern close to his face, and glaring at him curiously, "so the count has sent you down here to assist us?"

"Tis laborsome work, but ye'll get a bit to eat now and then, for there's no lack of rats in these quarters. Better to toil here on rat meat, than remain idle and starve above ground—what think ye?"

"That rat meat is preferable to malt cake," returned Hasselaer with a laugh.

The workman now conducted him into a low, narrow tunnel, the sides and roof of which were propped by beams and timbers. Water splashed under their feet and dripped from above as they advanced, and the air was impregnated with an icy moisture that penetrated to the very marrow of their bones.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Hasselaer with a shiver; "but this is a detestable place. Whither does it lead?"

"We hope in time it may bring us underneath the city wall," answered his companion. "However, there is much work to be done yet ere that is accomplished."

"Beneath the city wall? And for what purpose, prithee?"

"Why, to blow a breach in the ramparts with gunpowder, and so make an opening for our friends, the Spaniards."

Hasselaer was dumfounded at the treachery of the plot thus revealed to him. His mind became a prey to the keenest anxiety on behalf of his beloved city, and he resolved to make his escape at the first opportunity and thwart the threatened treason.

By this time they had reached a bend in the tunnel, and could see a number of lights glimmering faintly through the darkness ahead. As they advanced toward them, they encountered many ragged and filthy specters bearing pailfuls of earth to the shaft. After a while the glimmering lights grew brighter, and then could be seen the shadowy forms of workmen laboring industriously at the end of the tunnel. These miserable creatures stopped their work a moment to survey them as they approached, and then fell to again with pick and spade, as if toiling for their very lives.

"These fellows seem in love with their task," remarked Hasselaer.

"Because its completion means the end of their sufferings," was the reply.

Hasselaer was now assigned a place in the front rank of the laborers, and was ordered to begin work without further delay. Although he realized that every spadeful of earth he excavated was an act of treason, he applied himself to his task with apparent enthusiasm. Indeed, he hoped by so doing to gain the confidence of his associates, and render them less watchful of his movements.

Several hours passed by, during which a number of the workmen dropped down from sheer exhaustion, and then the gang to which he belonged was relieved. He was delighted at this respite, not only because he was weak and sick from breathing the stifling air of the tunnel; but also because he hoped, during the period of rest, to form some plan of escape.

On reaching the opening of the shaft, he and his companions were conducted to an apartment in the storehouse, where they were regaled with a repast of stewed rat meat and thin barley water. The famished wretches ate this disgusting food ravenously, nor did Hasselaer refuse his share of it.

The meal over, they flung themselves down upon a number of straw pallets that were stretched along the walls, and were soon snoring heavily.

Now the pallet to which Hasselaer had been assigned lay in the corner nearest the door, where a sentinel had been placed with particular instructions to keep a watchful eye upon him. During his first period of rest he became aware of this man's scrutiny; for, at his slightest movement, the fellow would stalk over to his bed and glare down upon him.

"I see that I am being carefully guarded," he reflected; "but I'll outwit my captors yet."

In pursuance of this purpose, he engaged one of his associates in conversation when they returned to duty in the tunnel.

"How long have you been working here, friend?" he asked as he threw a spadeful of earth into a bucket.

"Since the day the shaft was opened," was the reply.

"Ah, then, you must be accustomed to this dreadful place, and can sleep well during the rest period."

"Indeed I can; for I am so exhausted when I quit work that I could sleep under the muzzle of a cannon."

"I wish I could say that," said Hasselaer wearily; "but the novelty of our quarters keeps me awake. You see my bed is so near the door that I can hear every turn of the windlass. Perhaps if I could secure one farther off I might get the rest I need."

"That can be easily arranged," returned the other.

"How?"

"Why you can trade beds with me."

Hasselaer was overjoyed at having accomplished his object thus easily; but he did not allow his feelings to betray him. The next time they were ordered above ground, he kept close to his new acquaintance until the period allotted to slumber had arrived. Then he turned to him quietly and asked:

"Where lies your bed, friend?"

"Yonder; beneath that opening in the wall," replied the man, pointing to a narrow window that communicated with an inner chamber of the storehouse.

"And my bed is there," returned Hasselaer, indicating the pallet near the door.

A moment afterwards they separated, the man going off wearily to Hasselaer's bed, and the lieutenant moving quickly over to the one beneath the window.

CHAPTER XV.—THE ESCAPE.

FORTUNATELY, the guard's attention was otherwise engaged at the moment this exchange was being made. When he at last cast his eyes upon the bed he had been told to watch, he saw a man, whom he supposed to be Hasselaer, lying there, and was satisfied.

It happened that the bed the lieutenant now occupied was situated in the darkest corner of the apartment. A man might move about there unseen and unsuspected if he could avoid making a noise.

Waiting until his companions were all sleeping soundly, Hasselaer rose stealthily to his feet, and approached the open window. He was obliged to

move with extreme caution, to avoid making any sound which might attract the attention of the watchful guard.

Peering through the opening, he saw beyond him a region of utter darkness. An earthy smell assailed his nostrils, and the air of the place was damp and chill. Yet this mysterious chamber might prove an avenue to freedom, so he slipped through the window noiselessly and committed himself to fortune.

At the very first step he took forward he sank up to his ankles in mud. A few steps further brought him in contact with a great hillock of earth. It was evident that he was in the place where the conspirators piled the soil which they excavated from the tunnel.

He now felt his way onward with greater caution, skirting great piles of earth and stone, until he came to the rear wall of the storehouse. He looked about him for a window, but could discover none.

"It will be a sorry end to my adventure if I can find no way of escape," he murmured.

Just then his attention was attracted by a noise overhead. He listened attentively until it was repeated, and then recognized it as the scamperings of a rat between the plankings of a floor above him.

"If there is a story over this one," he reflected, "there is probably some way of reaching it."

And he resumed his explorations of the chamber in search of a flight of steps. Presently he stumbled against the rungs of a ladder and began mounting them cautiously.

They creaked beneath his weight, and filled him with alarm; nevertheless he continued to climb upward until his head struck the planks of a trap door. What if it should happen to be bolted?

His heart sank at the thought, for in that case escape would be impossible.

Raising his hands, he pushed against the door, and was overjoyed to discover that it yielded to his pressure.

He raised it higher, and presently a flood of daylight streamed in.

"I thought it was night," he mused; "but it appears it is broad day. It is very evident, however, that this upper chamber is amply provided with windows, through one of which I may hope to escape. But what if some of the Glippers should be stationed in this apartment?"

This thought made him tremble. For a moment he lost control of himself, and let the trap door fall back into its place with a noisy bang. A few seconds of profound silence followed. Then he heard a voice cry out from below:

"What noise is that?"

He looked down, and saw in the glimmering square of the window through which he had crawled, the head and shoulders of the guard. Hasselaer remained silent, hoping that the fellow would return to his post presently and leave him to the execution of his design. But it was fated otherwise.

All at once an awakened sleeper called out from the other chamber:

"There's an empty bed beside you, Dirck. Some one has made off."

"You're right, by Heaven!" exclaimed the guard excitedly; "but he won't escape me."

With these words he scrambled through the window, and made for the foot of the ladder.

Realizing the necessity of instant action, Hasselaer flung the trap door back on its hinges, and sprang through the opening. Then he slammed it down in its place to bolt it upon his pursuer; but there was neither lock nor bolt in evidence.

With a cry of dismay he ran over to one of the windows, opened it, and looked out. A narrow alley, bordered by squalid houses, met his gaze, and he knew at once that he was overlooking one of the purlieus of the city.

"Now, if I can only find some means of reaching the pavement," he thought, "all will be well. Perhaps it is not too great a height to drop from."

At that instant the guard sprang through the trap door with a bound, and he resolved to venture the attempt.

Crawling out through the window, Hasselaer clung to the sill with his hands, and straightening his body downward, let go. He reached the pavement without mishap and started to run along the alley; but he had not proceeded far when his pursuer appeared above him, brandishing a pistol in his hand.

"Come back!" he roared; "or I'll send a slug after you."

Hasselaer answered with a triumphant laugh. At that moment his heart was filled with joy; for had he not succeeded in gaining information of a plot by which it was intended to betray the city? Was he not free to reveal his knowledge to the authorities, and thus prevent the treason? Undoubtedly he would be hailed as the savior of Leyden, and the thought rendered him exultant.

Suddenly the sharp report of a pistol sounded in his ears, and he felt a strange shock between his shoulders. His head swam, he reeled forward sick and faint, and then for a moment lost consciousness.

"How queerly I feel!" he muttered on regaining his senses. "I believe I have been shot."

Stopping for a moment to recover his strength, he pressed onward again, but again was obliged to halt.

All at once a torrent of blood gushed from his mouth, and he reeled against the walls of a building. He felt terribly weak, and his body was racked with pain. It seemed as if he could not take another step forward; nevertheless he set his jaws resolutely and staggered on; for he realized that he held the fate of Leyden in his keeping.

"Oh, my God!" he cried in agony, "give me strength to hold out until I can warn my friends of their danger. Then I will die without complaint, if it be Thy will."

And now the air grew black around him; tremendous noises sounded in his ears, and his breath came and went in agonizing gasps. Yet still he kept his feet and tottered forward.

Then, for a second, his vision cleared, and he could see, a few yards ahead, the broad and shaded avenue of the Breede Straat, into which the alley opened. A few steps more and he would be among his friends.

At that moment a soldier of the Burger Guards crossed the entrance to

the alley, and looked toward him. The dying man recognized him as the sergeant of his own company.

His fast weakening heart fluttered with renewed hope. If he could only reach his comrade, he could save Leyden yet.

"Petrus! Petrus!"

He threw all his remaining strength into that despairing cry. He saw his comrade hastening toward him, and tottered on to meet him. Then of a sudden his limbs writhed in a terrible convulsion, darkness closed down over his soul, and he fell prone upon the pavement, with the life blood gushing from his lips.

When the soldier reached his prostrate form and raised it in his arms, he heard the words. "Treason! Betrayed!" issue from the mouth of the young hero, and then the lips that framed them became silent forever.

CHAPTER XVI.—THE ARRIVAL OF SUCCOR.

ON the first of September Admiral Boisot set sail from Rotterdam with a fleet of two hundred vessels, furnished with cannon, and manned by twenty five hundred veterans, experienced both on land and water.

This formidable armada reached the great Landscheiding dike early in the evening, and, finding it strongly fortified by the Spaniards, dropped anchor. Then, for the first time, the Dutch admiral realized the difficulties of the enterprise he had undertaken.

The Landscheiding was still nearly two feet above the water, and between it and Leyden, five miles distant, extended a level territory which the flood had not yet reached. Upon it were many villages, together with a chain of sixty two forts, all held by the veteran troops of the king.

For many days Boisot contented himself with harassing the enemy in their works; then, realizing that his expedition would prove a failure unless the Landscheiding was captured and demolished, he resolved to take it by assault. On the night of the 10th of September this was accomplished by surprise. The Spaniards were driven from the dike, and the Zealanders fortified themselves upon it without the loss of a man.

On the following day the enemy made a furious attack upon the embankment to recover what they had lost. A hot action ensued, in which they were completely defeated by the fierce Sea Beggars, who fought with a sanguinary fury that gave an earnest of the intense hatred which nerved their arms.

Having secured possession of the Landscheiding, Boisot broke it down in several places, in order to flood the region within, and allow a passage for his fleet through the gaps. Then, to his consternation, he discovered that another great dike, called the Greenway, opposed his progress about a mile further inward.

Fortunately, however, the Spaniards had neglected to fortify this barrier, and the audacious little admiral promptly carried it by storm, leveled it, and floated his ships in triumph over its ruins.

But even this victory did not bring him the result he had expected. The sea, which had thus far borne him on, now spreading over a very wide surface,

became too shallow for his vessels, and many of them ran aground. However, as he was within sight of Freshwater Lake, where the water was deep, he did not despair.

To gain access to the mere there was but one way—through the canal which formed its outlet. But on both banks of this waterway the Spaniards had erected formidable redoubts which they had garrisoned with troops to the number of three thousand. These defenses were well nigh impregnable; nevertheless, the bold Boisot determined to force his way between them.

Selecting a few of his strongest vessels, he armed and manned them with his heaviest cannon and bravest Zealanders, and led the way himself in a desperate attempt to reach the mere. The battle that followed was short and bloody. After losing a number of his men, the shrewd admiral realized that the position of the enemy was too strong to be forced, and withdrew from the unequal contest, defeated and almost despairing.

Thus matters stood until the 18th of the month, when the wind shifted to the northwest, and for three days blew a gale. The waters of the North Sea were piled upon the coast of Holland, now unprotected by the dikes, and before two days had passed, the armada was afloat again.

At this juncture a peasant from Zoetermeer village informed the admiral that he could reach the Freshwater Lake by making a detour to the right, where there was a comparatively low dike which led between the villages of Zoetermeer and Benthuyzen. With this man as a guide, Boisot set sail for the barrier indicated, and appeared before it so suddenly that the Spaniards who had been stationed there for its defense were seized with a panic and fled towards Leyden. Boisot immediately broke through the embankment, flooded the country within, and reached the Freshwater Lake with his fleet.

Three great dikes had now been passed, and the flotilla, advancing with the advancing waves, and driving the enemy steadily before it, was drawing nearer to the beleaguered city. The Ark of Delft, bristling with cannon, and moved by its wonderful paddle wheels now arrived at Zoetermeer, and was soon followed by the entire fleet.

The ferocious Sea Beggars celebrated their triumph by setting fire, not only to that village, but to Benthuyzen as well. The flames cast a lurid glare over the watery and desolate waste around, and were seen at Leyden, where they appeared to the despairing burghers as the beacon of hope.

The armada now proceeded to North Aa, the enemy retreating before it to Zoeterwoude, a strongly fortified village less than two miles distant from the city walls. The bulk of the Spanish army had by this time been driven into a narrow circle of forts within the immediate neighborhood of Leyden.

Besides the intrenchments at Zoeterwoude, they held the strong castles of Lammen and Leyderdorp, each within three hundred yards of the town. At Leyderdorp were the headquarters of Valdez, while Colonel Borgia commanded at Lammen.

And now Boisot was delayed by another barrier, called the Kirkway, the last of the great dikes which protected Leyden from the inroads of the sea. An adverse wind arising, and the waters spreading once more over a wider space, his whole flotilla was stranded anew.

Day after day the fleet lay motionless upon the shallow sea. The Sea Beggars, weary of their compulsory idleness, began to mutiny, and it seemed as if the expedition would end in failure after all.

At this crisis the Prince of Orange appeared upon the scene, and inspired the despondent men with fresh courage. After reconnoitering the ground, he issued orders for the immediate destruction of the Kirkway; then he held a long conference with Admiral Boisot, and departed for Delft.

CHAPTER XVII.—READY FOR THE MATCH.

WHILE these operations were in progress, Leyden was gradually approaching its last gasp. Although the burghers were aware that Boisot's fleet was not far off, they knew full well the tremendous obstacles which lay in its way and despaired of its success. Indeed, since the second stranding of the ships, hope and fear, in sickening alternation, distracted every breast.

At the dawn of each day every eye was turned wistfully to the vanes of the steeples; for the people realized that, as long as the easterly breeze prevailed, it was in vain to expect succor from the ocean. Yet, while watching and waiting thus patiently, they were literally starving. Bread, malt, cake, horse flesh, had entirely disappeared, while dogs, cats, rats, and other vermin were esteemed luxuries.

Until the last of September a small herd of cows had been kept for the milk they gave; but now the burgomaster ordered a few killed each day, so that their flesh might be distributed in minute particles among the famished population. Lean and ghastly skeletons swarmed daily around the shambles where these cattle were slaughtered, to lap up the blood as it ran through the gutters, and to secure pieces of the hides.

Women and children, all day long, were seen searching the refuse heaps for morsels of food, which they disputed fiercely with the famishing dogs. Every tree in the city was denuded of its leaves; every herb and flower was converted into food; yet these expedients could not avert starvation.

The number of deaths that occurred daily was frightful. Husbands saw their wives droop and die before their eyes; mothers dropped dead in the streets, clutching the lean corpses of their offspring to their breasts. Whole families perished together from a disorder called the plague, which now stalked at noonday through the city. From this scourge alone nearly eight thousand perished; yet the citizens refused to surrender.

There was something sublime in their fortitude. From the depths of their misery they emerged like heroes, hurling from the ramparts defiance at their enemies.

"Ye call us rat eaters and dog eaters," they cried, "and it is true. So long, then, as ye hear dog bark or cat mew within the walls, ye may know that the city holds out. And when all have perished but ourselves, be sure that we will devour our left arms, retaining our right to defend our women, our liberty, and our religion, against the foreign tyrant. Should God, in his wrath, doom us to destruction, and deny us all relief, even then will we maintain ourselves forever against your entrance. When the last hour has come,

with our own hands we will set fire to the city and perish, men, women, and children together in the flames, rather than suffer our homes to be polluted and our liberties to be crushed."

To which the Spaniards would shout back derisively:

"As well can the Prince of Orange pluck the stars from the sky as bring the ocean to the walls of Leyden for your relief."

On the 28th of September a dove flew into the city bearing a message from Admiral Boisot. In it he described the position of his fleet at North Aa, and assured the burghers that, within a very few days, he would appear at their gates with relief.

"The equinoctial gales are now due," he wrote, "and will be sure to bring the sea to my aid. With the rising of the waters, my fleet will be set afloat, and then I will hasten to your deliverance at once."

Adrian Van der Werf read this letter in public upon the market place, and ordered all the bells in the city rung for joy.

Among those who listened to the reading was Count Marinus Deuterman. A sardonic smile lit up his scornful features at the confident words of the admiral, and as he left the assemblage of citizens, he muttered under his breath:

"You promise very bravely, my worthy Admiral Boisot; but it may happen that I will circumvent you yet."

After leaving the market place, the count bent his steps toward the alley which he had haunted so frequently of late. Turning into it, he hurried along, until he reached the dilapidated house described in a previous chapter. A moment afterwards he was seated at the rude plank table in the first of the forbidding chambers, conversing with several of his associates in treason.

"Well, what news from the tunnel?" he asked of a cadaverous fellow, whose soiled leather jerkin and breeches emitted a strong odor of earth.

"The work is about completed, my lord."

"About completed, say you? Then is there very much more to be done?"

"No, my lord," answered the man. "The tunnel is already finished. We have reached the city wall, and are at present making excavations to the right and left beneath it, in which to bestow the explosives."

"Good!" exclaimed Deuterman, with a smile of satisfaction. "But can you tell me how long it will take to complete these excavations?"

The man stroked his chin reflectively, and answered after a pause:

"By working all the men the job could be finished by midnight."

"In that case," commanded the count, "order all hands into the tunnel at once."

"Have you a reason for this sudden haste, my lord?" asked the man as he arose to obey.

"The best in the world," replied Deuterman, with an anxious contraction of his brow. "I have just come from the market place, where I listened to the reading of a letter from Admiral Boisot. The knave promises to come to the relief of the city with the first equinoctial gale. These storms are due now at any time, and you know very well what they can do. A good stiff northwester just now would pile the ocean over the land. The water would

rise to a sufficient height to carry Boisot's fleet to the very gates of Leyden. So we must be prepared to act at any time that the necessity arises."

Having despatched this retainer on his errand, the count turned to another Glipper who sat at his right.

"How about the gunpowder, Dirck?" he asked. "Have we a sufficient quantity for our purpose?"

"There are twelve kegs of it in the storehouse loft, and a barrel or two in the workshop," was the answer.

"Well, have everything in readiness to roll them into the tunnel as soon as the excavations are completed."

Having delivered himself of this order, Count Deuterman arose and departed for his palace on the Breede Straat.

Shortly after midnight he returned to the house to superintend the final arrangements of his plot. He learned that the excavations were completed, and that everything was now in readiness for the planting of his mine.

This part of the work he looked after in person, going into the tunnel with the men who rolled the powder kegs, and seeing that they were placed in such a position that they could not fail to demolish a considerable portion of the city ramparts when the time came to explode them. With his own hand he laid the train connecting them one with the other, and, by way of the tunnel, to the entrance of the shaft. Then, after reviewing his work to see that it was flawless, he ordered the tunnel closed and strict guard to be maintained upon it.

"Do you intend to blow up the walls tonight?" asked Dirck, as he turned to depart.

"Not for several days yet," was the reply, "unless our friends, the Spaniards, are prepared sooner. However, our plot is sure to succeed now," he added with a smile of satanic satisfaction, "for everything is in readiness for the match."

CHAPTER XVIII.—IN THE DUNGEONS OF LAMMEN.

THE castle of Lammen was situated on a narrow strip of territory inclosed between two branches of the river Rhine. It was a venerable pile, once the stronghold of a robber baron; but since feudal times used as a station for collecting tolls from the barges which passed up and down the river.

In this peaceful service its outer fortifications had been allowed to crumble into ruins; only the great, buttressed round tower of the donjon keep retained its ancient, formidable character.

On account of the thickness of its walls and its peculiar situation, this massive structure was almost impregnable. It had been built to withstand not only the assaults of man, but the ravages of time, like the quaint Mausethurm farther up the river.

In the base of the keep were the dungeons, in the darkest and most loathsome of which Valdez had ordered Maurice Van Texel to be confined. He passed through all the degrees of suffering that prisoners usually experience.

At first he bore up bravely and was comparatively cheerful. He ate the

coarse food his jailer brought him, and slept as tranquilly on his straw pallet as though it had been a bed of down. But after a few days spent in solitude and darkness he began to despair. He no longer replied to the greetings of his jailer, but left the food he brought him untasted.

Then, as his vitality had been already greatly sapped by sufferings and privations, he grew weak and sick, and could barely totter about in his dark dungeon, clinging to the leaking walls. At times he became flighty and was visited by strange hallucinations. Fantastic shapes and grotesque faces danced and grinned at him from the shadows, and he began to believe that he was going stark mad.

One day, or night—it was impossible for him to tell which—his jailer entered his cell and told him to prepare for an examination at the hands of General Valdez. He then conducted him through a winding passage to a large, square room in another part of the keep, the walls of which excluded the light as effectually as did those of the dungeon he had just left.

Two candles were burning on a table at one end of the apartment, revealing a number of grim looking appliances for administering torture which had evidently been conveyed there not long before. Back of the table sat a tall, dark visaged man whom he immediately recognized as Valdez. He rose from his seat when the prisoner entered, and advanced to meet him with apparent good humor.

"I trust I find you well," he said, in tones that were intended to be conciliatory. "If you answer the questions I put to my satisfaction, you need have no fear; otherwise——"

He shrugged his gaunt shoulders and cast a significant glance upon the instruments of torture; but Van Texel was not dismayed.

"I will answer your excellency's questions in such matters as I may without bringing harm to the innocent," he said respectfully.

At this Valdez elevated his eyebrows and laughed softly.

"Bravely spoken, Captain Van Texel," he returned with a sneer. "You see, I know your name and rank; therefore you will realize how hopeless it will be to deceive me. Now what I require of you is really very little. I merely want you to tell me how affairs stand in the city of Leyden, so that I may know how to prosecute this siege. I shall also expect you to inform me of the intentions of the Prince of Orange in regard to the beleaguered city. You may proceed in your own way."

Van Texel remained silent.

"Well," said Valdez, after a pause, "do you intend to reply to my queries?"

"If you expect me to reveal the counsels of my friends," replied Van Texel loftily, "or to betray their purposes, you are deceiving yourself, my lord."

Valdez became livid with rage.

"Obstinate fool!" he screamed. "I'll have thy secrets from thee, if I have to tear thee limb from limb."

Then, turning to an alcove behind him:

"Ho, men! to the torture with the varlet!" he cried.

Instantly four executioners, bare armed and masked, entered the chamber,

and, surrounding the prisoner, stripped him to the waist. Then they fastened him by his wrists and ankles to an upright frame, and tortured him in a manner too horrible to describe. They pinched him with red hot tongs; bruised and crushed his flesh and dislocated his joints; yet not a groan escaped him.

Twice he fainted; but there was a physician standing close by, who quickly brought him back to life with powerful restoratives. And through it all Valdez looked on with gloating eyes, stroking his peaked beard and mocking him.

Finally the physician announced that it would be perilous to torture the prisoner further, as he had reached the limit of his endurance. So he was released for the time and carried back to his dungeon. And an hour afterwards the jailer brought word to the Spanish general that the poor, maimed creature was praising God with what strength he had left for inspiring him with sufficient fortitude to pass through the dreadful trial.

Other tortures of an equally agonizing nature were executed upon Van Texel at frequent intervals; but not a word could be wrung from him concerning the affairs and purposes of his friends. He remembered his promise to the burgomaster; that he would submit to every torment sooner than reveal the desperate straits of Leyden, and was resolved to die rather than break it.

At last it became evident, even to Valdez, that a man who could endure tortures in such an exalted spirit could never be subdued by mere physical pain. So he resolved to subjugate his will through his imagination.

There now ensued a considerable period during which Van Texel saw no one, not even his jailer. His meals were passed in to him through an opening in the door, and occasionally a small candle end was left burning in his cell; but he was served at such irregular intervals that he scarce knew what to make of it.

Sometimes he was deprived of food for so long that he believed it was the Spanish general's intention to let him die of famine; again, he was given such a plenty that, after he had eaten his fill, there was a large supply left over for the rats that thronged his dungeon.

But he soon learned better than to let these animals fatten on this surplusage. For whenever he was so provisioned, his jailer did not visit him again until he was well nigh perishing of hunger. He had prepared himself to undergo still further tortures, and fully expected that he would eventually succumb to them and die. He even prayed that such a fate might speedily crown his sufferings. But it was not so ordained.

Days that seemed to him as weeks, and weeks as years dragged on, and still he was not summoned to the torture room. In this miserable condition the enthusiasm which had hitherto sustained him gradually died out in his breast and a feeling of utter hopelessness took its place.

He was convinced that Valdez, finding that torture availed not to wrest his secrets from him, had abandoned him to pass the remainder of his days in confinement. This conviction grew upon him with the lapse of time—time that he could not compute; that measured by the sum of his sufferings was an eternity.

Once when he awoke out of a troubled sleep, he noticed a kind of glow-worm light in his cell. He cast his eyes around to see whence it proceeded, and uttered a cry of terror.

Letters of living fire gleamed upon the wall. He looked again and read the awful legend :

“ABANDONED OF GOD AND MAN.”

Drunk with horror he fell back upon his pallet in a swoon. When his senses returned the letters had disappeared from the wall ; but they had been merely transferred to his heart. It seemed as if they had been branded there by Satan, who already claimed him as his own.

The poor, deluded wretch experienced all the agonies of a lost soul. He felt certain that his guardian angel had forever left him, and that fiends had invaded his dungeon.

Who but fiends could have written those flaming words?

It should be remembered that he lived in an age when the belief in the appearances of devils was universal. Moreover, certain startling uses to which phosphorous can be put were not then as familiar phenomena as they are now.

He made the circuit of his cell, groping his way by the walls, fully expecting at each step to be confronted by some hoofed and horned apparition ; but wherever he looked, before, to the right, to the left, over his shoulder, darkness impenetrable surrounded him.

Then he knelt down trembling upon the slimy floor and prayed. He called upon the name of his Maker, pleadingly, passionately, and lo ! a sweet calm descended upon his troubled soul, and he rose up strengthened, comforted. And the jailer brought word to Valdez that the prisoner was once again singing the praises of God.

His heroic mood had returned, but not his wonted energy. Long suffering and solitary confinement had wrought a fearful change in him.

From this time on the prisoner was visited by many startling apparitions. It never once occurred to him that he might be the victim of trickery on the part of his persecutors ; for he knew nothing of the resources of magic, and placed entire reliance upon the evidences of his senses. Indeed he was fast becoming an imbecile when an event occurred that put an end to his unutterable misery.

One night he awoke from a troubled sleep to discover that a mighty tempest was raging outside. He could hear the roaring of the wind, and feel the rocking of the tower, even in his remote place of confinement.

The dull thud of waves, breaking against the walls of his dungeon smote upon his ears. It was evident that the waters of the Rhine were rising round him.

All at once he heard a gurgling sound.

Directed by his hearing, he found the spot, and lo ! a stream of water was spurting in through a rat hole in the wall, and spreading out in a rapidly increasing pool upon the floor. He made a hasty circumference of the cell and found that, in other places, little streams and rivulets were trickling down the stones.

Then the rats came out of their hiding places and scampered about, squeaking.

There were hundreds of them. Their shrill, affrighted screams made a horrible din in the place. They had found an ingress to the dungeon through the holes they had made between the loose stones of the floor; but the water, rushing in at these openings, cut their means of egress off.

As the water deepened, they swam around the prisoner, and rendered bold by fear, scrambled up his rags. He was compelled to wage a desperate warfare with them.

The water had now reached his knees.

It was pouring through numberless chinks and crannies which it had made in the walls; but mostly through the rat holes. He could feel it creeping up, inch by inch, and knew it would not be long before the dungeon would be completely submerged.

Feeling his way to the door, he rattled the grating violently and cried aloud for help. But no one came to his aid. He hobbled to and fro, from wall to wall of his dungeon, with the fierce impatience of a caged tiger, looking vainly for some loophole of escape; for it seemed preposterous that he should have survived such frightful tortures only for this miserable end.

By this time he was immersed to the waist.

Exhausted by his efforts, he clutched the bars of the grating desperately to keep from falling back into the icy element. His voice grew weaker and weaker, and his cries for help were now mere gasps and whispers. Would no one come to release him? Had his custodians forgotten him? Must he perish like the vile rats who, one by one, were sinking around him?

Higher and higher rose the water. It was up to his shoulders now.

His strength was fast ebbing away. He felt that death was close upon him, and, with that intense activity of the consciousness which comes to the drowning, the whole panorama of his past life whirled before his mental vision. Childhood, youth, manhood, flashed before him in a succession of vivid images. Then faint strains of music, divinely sweet, lulled him into dreamy rest—gradually dying—dying—dying away, and afterwards oblivion.

The water had closed above his head.

CHAPTER XIX.—THE ANCIENT FLOOD RENEWED.

It was the night of the 2d of October. The Seigneur of Nordwyck and his daughter Jacqueline were sitting together in an upper chamber of their home in Leyden, when they heard a great booming of bells in all the towers and steeples of the city.

The wind had been blowing violently from the sea during the day, and after sundown had increased in fury, until it had attained the velocity of a hurricane. Then the worthy Adrian Van der Werf had sent instructions to all the bell ringers in the town to resort immediately to their posts, and give voice to the innumerable iron tongues with which their belfries were provided. This was done to notify the citizens that the long expected equinoctial gale was raging.

And now they clanged tumultuously—small bells, great bells—now ringing singly, now by twos and threes together—sometimes heard faintly and again deluging the city with a flood of silvery sounds.

John Van der Does went over to one of the windows, and opened it to look at the sky. The wind rushed in with a fury that almost carried him off his feet. Hastily closing the sash, he staggered back into the apartment, shaking his head gravely and saying:

"There's mischief in the air this night. My place is on the ramparts, not here."

"Surely you'll not venture out a night like this, father?" asked Jacqueline anxiously.

"Aye, my dear!" was the determined reply. "Where a man's duty calls him, there he must go, will he nill he."

Jacqueline said no more. She knew that it was useless to parley with her father when he had resolved upon a course of action, so she brought him his cloak and sword, and watched him prepare to face the storm with a look of sorrowful resignation.

When he was ready to take his departure, John Van der Does embraced his daughter tenderly and left the room. She heard him descend the stairway with resolute tread, and then returned to her seat to watch through the long, long night.

What a sense of peril the wild clamor of the bells inspired! The tongues of the steeples mingled in a confused uproar that swept over the house tops on the waves of the tempest like the affrighted cries of living things.

The wind was now blowing with such tremendous velocity that it seemed as if the toppling chimneys in the city must be carried away before it. The house rocked and swayed violently, and shook with a tremulousness that extended through its walls from foundation to roof.

Although Jacqueline was in a state of nervous excitement bordering on hysteria, she did not move or utter a sound, but sat with her head bowed between her hands in a kind of trance. She was wondering what could have befallen the gallant Captain Van Texel, who, since his delivery of the burgo-master's message to the prince, had not been heard from. Had he remained with the prince in Rotterdam? Or had he attempted to return to Leyden, and been captured by his enemies on the way?

Her entire soul was uplifted in silent prayer on his behalf.

But the burgher captain was not the only one of whom she thought that night. There was another cavalier, her lover's dear friend, whose sad fate filled her with grief. The heroic young Hasselaer had met his death while engaged in her service, and she could never forget him. She remembered how one of his comrades had found him dying in an alley, and how bravely he had tried to reveal the plot he had discovered.

The nature of this plot was still a mystery. She had endeavored to solve it, but in vain. And now she bitterly regretted having kept her suspicions a secret from her father, for the fate of Leyden was hanging in the balance.

She was aroused from these sorrowful reflections by the sound of a distant crash. She hastened to the window and looked out.

The night was black. She could see great banks of clouds careering across the sky with impetuous fury, but nothing more. Yet what she heard appalled her.

It was the lashing of waves against the walls of Leyden, which were but a few yards distant from her father's house. She knew then that the city was completely surrounded by the waters of the ocean, and that Admiral Boisot's fleet must be afloat.

The bells of Leyden were now silent, as if completely routed and subdued by the howling wind. She became fearful that some dreadful calamity might happen the city; yet she could not reassure herself by observation on account of the impenetrable darkness, and the tremendous hurricane that filled the sky.

Surmounting the roof of the house was an inclosed cupola which overtopped the city ramparts. To this place she hastened and sat down, trembling, to wait for day to dawn.

As the hours dragged wearily along, the roaring of the wind became more and more terrific. At intervals, low, ominous sounds, like the rumbling of distant thunder, smote upon her ears and informed her that a dike had burst.

Sometimes these sounds were accompanied by a shock as of an earthquake, and the wind rocked cupola would tremble violently. She knew then that the sea had made a breach in an embankment near at hand, and this would make her fearful lest the walls of Leyden would be swept away, and the city be engulfed in the tempestuous waters.

About midnight she heard the roar of a cannon, and, looking over the city wall, beheld a terrific spectacle.

A fierce naval battle was taking place on the black waste of water. By the glare of the flashing cannon she saw the ships of Boisot's armada advancing toward the city, battling with the Spanish fleet among the branches of quiet orchards, and with the chimney stacks of half submerged farmhouses rising around the contending vessels.

The air shook with the discharge of artillery, and, the neighboring village of Zoeterwoude catching fire, the entire scene of battle was illumined by the conflagration.

Jacqueline watched the struggle with the keenest anxiety; for she realized that upon its issue hung the fate of Holland.

The enemy's vessels were soon sunk, and their crews hurled into the waves. On went Boisot's victorious fleet, sweeping over the broad waters which lay between Zoeterwoude and Zwieteron. As they approached some shallows which skirted the great Freshwater Lake, the Sea Beggars dashed into the waves, and with sheer strength shouldered every vessel through.

Two obstacles still lay in their path to Leyden—the fortress of Zoeterwoude and the castle of Lammen. As Boisot's fleet approached the former the Spaniards poured out from the fortress, and fled precipitately along a dike which led in a westerly direction towards The Hague. Their narrow path was rapidly vanishing in the waves, and hundreds sank beneath the constant deepening flood.

The Zealanders, thirsting for vengeance, sprang from their vessels upon

the crumbling dikes and drove their retreating foes into the sea. They attacked them with harpoon, boathook and dagger, plunging into the waves in the ardor and ferocity of their pursuit. The number of Spaniards who thus fell before the wild Sea Beggars, who neither gave nor took quarter, has been estimated at not less than a thousand.

And now the victorious flotilla pressed on toward the castle of Lammen, the Ark of Delft leading the way.

Swarming at it was with soldiers, and bristling with artillery, this stronghold seemed to defy the armada, either to carry it by storm, or to pass under its guns into the city. So Boisot anchored his fleet within a respectful distance, and awaited the coming of daylight.

For a time the fighting ceased, and Jacqueline had an opportunity to reflect on the strange sights and sounds that occurred at different moments to bewilder her.

She observed a long procession of lights issuing from the castle, and flitting across the black face of the waters like will-o'-the-wisps.

What could it mean?

Were the Spaniards issuing secretly from the stronghold to surprise the city? This was her first suspicion; but, on noticing that the flickering lights were moving off in the direction of The Hague, she became somewhat reassured.

Suddenly a terrific explosion rent the air, and that part of the city wall over which she was gazing was lifted from its foundation, and fell with a thunderous crash.

For a moment her senses were so stunned by the roar that she remained as mute and motionless as a statue. Then it instantly dawned upon her that she had just witnessed the consummation of the plot she had so long suspected, and lifting her clasped hands to heaven, she gave utterance to a wail of agony.

"Leyden is lost!" she cried. "And the fault is mine, mine! O God have mercy upon the poor burghers!"

CHAPTER XX.—A STRANGE AWAKENING.

At the moment the water closed over Van Texel's head, and he lost consciousness, a fortunate accident happened. Pressed outward by the flood, the great oaken door to which he clung broke away from its moldering frame, and rose to the surface, with the prisoner on its upper side still hanging to the grating.

And now that he could breathe again, he soon began to revive. His senses gradually returned, and then he experienced such a feeling of weakness and nausea that he almost regretted his escape from death. It was not until this deadly sickness had, in a measure, passed away that he discerned the change in his surroundings.

He now realized that he was no longer in the dungeon. He could tell that by the peculiar freshness of the air he breathed. Then where was he?

It was in vain that he endeavored to answer this question. He knew that

he was afloat upon a raft, surrounded by darkness and water, but nothing more. Then he remembered his fearful experiences in the cell, up to the very moment he lost consciousness, and he shuddered and groaned aloud.

A long, long period of suffering followed, and then, utterly exhausted, he fell asleep. He was awakened by a cheery soprano voice close to his ear.

"Awake, sir, awake! What, can ye lie dreamin' here when the world's come to an end?"

Opening his eyes, he beheld an urchin, lantern in hand, standing upon a flight of steps, on which his raft had stranded, and gazing down upon him with the keenest curiosity.

"Where am I? How came I here?" he asked faintly.

"Ah, how indeed!" the urchin answered. "Ye'll have to ask the Spaniards that. 'Twas they abandoned ye, not I."

"Abandoned me?"

"Aye, when they ran away from the castle last night."

At this reply Van Texel sat upright on his raft, and turned toward the boy with a look of blank amazement.

"Did you say that the Spaniards have abandoned Lammen?" he inquired after a pause.

The boy nodded an assent, and grinned.

"Alas, then," cried Van Texel in despair, "if that be so Leyden must have fallen, and they have gone thither to pillage and murder the poor burghers."

"Nay, do not grieve on Leyden's account, my good sir," said the boy. "I have just come from that city and know that it is safe. Indeed, there is likely to be great rejoicing there in a short while."

"What do you mean?" asked Van Texel eagerly.

"That the Spaniards have been driven away by the ocean and Admiral Boisot, and that succor will reach the starving citizens this morning."

Van Texel could hardly contain himself for joy.

"Are you speaking the truth, boy?" he cried excitedly. "Can it be possible that what you tell me is so?"

"It is God's own truth," the urchin returned solemnly. "But if you don't believe me, come and see for yourself."

Van Texel arose from the raft, and followed the boy up the steps to a door that opened into the upper chambers of the castle. From thence they mounted a winding stairway that led up through the keep to the platform that surmounted it; and, as they climbed, the boy told all that had occurred since the arrival of Boisot's flotilla to the relief of the suffering city.

"Last night," he concluded, "while I was gazing from the ramparts toward Lammen, I saw lights moving out of the castle toward The Hague. I concluded at once that the Spaniards were deserting the place, and running away. So, after waiting a while to give them a chance to make off, I lowered myself from the wall, got into a skiff, and rowed out here to satisfy myself that I was right. And then I found you floating in the cellar of the castle, and—but here we are at the tower's top, and now you can see for yourself that I speak the truth."

As they emerged into the open air, the day was beginning to break. The

light was not strong as yet ; but it struck upon Van Texel's sight with excruciating pain. He was compelled to close his eyes at frequent intervals, to accustom them to the brightness ; for he had lived so long in darkness that even the morning twilight was too strong for them.

After a while he was able to keep them open for several minutes together. Then, looking over the parapets, he beheld a spectacle that astonished him.

Leyden stood before him, with its circumvallating walls, fantastic roofs and chimneys, grim battlements and towers and lofty steeples. But it was no longer an inland city ; an angry sea surrounded it. The smiling meadows, that once stretched eastward and westward from its gates, dotted with herds of browsing kine, were now covered by a desolate waste of water. The great Kirkway dike had disappeared, and it was impossible to mark the line where the Rhine ended and the sea began.

Turning his gaze in the opposite direction, he saw a formidable fleet of war ships and transports riding the waves within cannonshot of the castle. The largest of the vessels flew the flag of Admiral Boisot, and, on observing it closer, he recognized it as the *Ark of Delft*, which he had seen at Rotterdam.

Even while he was looking, its huge paddle wheels began to revolve, and it crept closer and closer to the castle.

Suddenly a puff of white smoke shot out from its bows, and a few seconds afterwards the report of a cannon boomed over the water. This opening shot was followed by a broadside, and presently the entire armada formed in battle array, and began a steady bombardment of the keep.

"Our friends evidently think the Spaniards are still in possession of this place," cried Van Texel. "We must warn them not to waste their powder."

The urchin threw his cap in the air and capered about the platform.

"Ho! Ho!" he shouted gleefully. "Isn't this splendid. What a fine story I'll have to tell the lads when I return to Leyden! Who would believe that one half starved man and a little boy could hold the castle of Lammen against the entire Dutch navy!"

"Cease your gabble!" exclaimed Van Texel sternly, "and listen to me. It is necessary that our friends should be informed immediately of the true state of affairs here. I propose, therefore, to swim out to the flagship, and meanwhile do you clamber upon the parapet and wave a signal with your cap."

With these words he turned about, and, a moment afterwards, his footsteps could be heard clattering down the winding staircase of the tower.

Soon afterwards Admiral Boisot, looking toward the stronghold from the deck of his flagship, beheld a lad standing upon the highest point of the battlements, waving a cap frantically above his head. Then, glancing downward he saw to his amazement a man run out of the castle, leap into the sea and wade toward him breast high in the water.

CHAPTER XXI.—WHAT THE DAWN REVEALED.

THE Seigneur of Nordwyck was standing on the ramparts, gazing anxiously at the procession of lights that issued from the castle of Lammen, when the mine beneath the city wall was exploded.

Calling upon the soldiers near by to follow, he ran with all possible speed toward the scene of the disaster. On reaching it he found the breach filled with excited citizens. While endeavoring to marshal them in some kind of order, Adrian Van der Werf came running up.

"What has happened, seigneur?" he asked excitedly.

"Treason! Base treason!" answered the commandant, pointing to the huge gap in the ramparts.

"What! have the Spaniards blown up the wall?" queried the burgomaster aghast.

"Not the Spaniards," returned the commandant savagely; "but some vile traitors in among us."

"Impossible!"

"On the contrary," said Van der Does, with a harsh, menacing laugh, "it is as certain as death. The Spaniards could not have run a tunnel to the wall with all the country round them under water, whereas it was perfectly practicable to do so from some point within the city."

In the mean-time the crowd around the breach had increased to a multitude. Men, women and children were gathered there, expecting every moment to behold the dreaded Spaniards come pouring through the opening.

Horror was depicted upon every face; everything was vague and mysterious; and, in the terror of the hour, even the starving forgot their hunger.

The Seigneur of Nordwyck lost no time in completing his preparations for defense. He ordered his men to throw up a low rampart across the opening with the stones of the demonished wall; placed several pieces of artillery in this impromptu fort, and massed his men at arms behind them.

Everything was in readiness for the expected onslaught of the enemy, and yet they did not come. Hour after hour passed by; but nothing occurred to justify the alarm of the burghers. Hope revived in their breasts; their spirits rose; and, when day began at last to break, they had entirely recovered from their fear.

As the light grew brighter, the burgomaster mounted the city ramparts and cast his eyes over the surrounding country. It was completely submerged by the water of the ocean, and white capped waves were hurrying madly inland as far as his gaze could reach. Only steeples, treetops, and the roofs of the tallest houses appeared above the flood. It seemed indeed as if the ancient deluge had been renewed.

It was apparent that the gale had not abated one jot of its violence with the dawn of day. Still the ocean poured in upon the land, and still the mighty wind lashed it on to its work of inundation and destruction.

Looking toward the castle of Lammen, Van der Werf observed that a death-like stillness enveloped it. Although the fleet of Admiral Boisot had begun to bombard it with the dawn, not a cannon or a musket responded from its walls. There was something alarming, even suspicious in this silence, and the breast of the brave burgomaster was filled with anxiety.

Suddenly he descried a man leave the castle and wade breast high through the water toward the fleet. A moment afterwards a solitary boy appeared upon the summit of the stronghold, waving a cap above his head.

"Strange!" muttered Van der Werf. "I wonder what it can mean."

His doubts were soon solved; for no sooner had the man from the castle reached Admiral Boisot's flagship, than a tremendous cheer arose from the sailors on board, and the ship began moving toward the city. The sailors on the other vessels immediately took up the cheering, and presently the whole flotilla was on its way to Leyden. It was evident that the Spaniards had abandoned the castle under cover of the darkness and retreated panic stricken toward The Hague. The procession of lights which had been seen moving during the night were no doubt the lanterns that guided them on their way.

No sooner was the burgomaster convinced of this fact than he tore his cloak from his shoulders, and, waving it frantically toward the advancing flotilla, cried out in a frenzy of joy:

"Saved! Saved!"

As if this was the signal for a general demonstration, a multitude of citizens clambered upon the wall, and raised a shout of welcome. A thousand improvised banners waved in the air; men embraced each other and wept for joy, for they realized that their long agony was at an end.

Again the burgomaster raised a joyous shout:

"Long live Admiral Boisot! Long live the Sea Beggars!"

The cry ran along the ramparts and was echoed back from the ships again and again. Presently the grotesque little admiral appeared upon the deck of the Ark of Delft, which led the flotilla, and made a sweeping bow to the people on the wall. Then he raised a loaf of bread above his head and waved it to and fro. At this the famished citizens broke out in fresh acclamations of delight.

At last the fleet reached Leyden and entered its canals. As the ships moved along the waterways, the quays on both sides were thronged with the famishing population. Every human being who could stand came forth to greet the preservers of the city.

"Bread! Bread!"

This appealing cry was heard on every side, and the Sea Beggars responded to it promptly. Food was thrown from every vessel among the crowd. The poor creatures, who for two months had tasted no wholesome nourishment, and who had literally been living within the jaws of death, snatched eagerly the blessed gift, at last too liberally bestowed. Many choked themselves to death in the excess of their greed; others became ill from the effects of too great a plenty suddenly succeeding starvation.

As Admiral Boisot stepped ashore he was welcomed by the burgomaster, and a solemn procession was immediately formed. Magistrates and citizens, wild Zealanders, emaciated burgher guards, sailors, soldiers, women, children, all bent their steps without delay to the great church of St. Pancras, to kneel in humble gratitude before the King of Kings.

At the head of the procession, borne upon the shoulders of two officers of the burgher guards, with Admiral Boisot on his right hand and the burgomaster on his left, appeared a lean, sallow and emaciated creature, whom the citizens greeted with profuse demonstrations of gratitude and affection.

"All honor to Maurice Van Texel! God bless the deliverer of Leyden!" they cried.

And then they pressed about him so eagerly to kiss his filthy rags that it was found necessary to surround him with a strong guard to keep him from being overwhelmed by the crush.

After prayers in the church, the whole vast congregation joined in a hymn of thanksgiving. Thousands of voices raised the song, but few were able to carry it to its conclusion; for the universal emotion became too full for utterance, and the hymn was abruptly suspended, while the multitude wept like children.

At the termination of this scene, the city magistrates assembled in the town hall to take measures for distributing food and relieving the necessities of the sick. The Seigneur of Nordwyck was present at the conference, and so was his former page, Maurice Van Texel.

And now John Van der Does gave evidence of the gallant and chivalrous gentleman he was. Rising in the presence of the entire assembly, he turned toward Van Texel with a courtly bow and spoke as follows:

"It is but mete and right that I should make amends to this honorable cavalier for my ungenerous treatment of him in the past. Moreover, it is appropriate that I should do this in a public manner; for I have grievously misunderstood and wronged him. I now apologize to him, therefore, in the presence of this honorable body for having forbidden him my house. And, to show how sincere I am in this, I now invite him to accept of my hospitality. Furthermore, if he still entertains an affection for my daughter, Jacqueline, I shall consider it an honor to bestow her into his keeping."

At the conclusion of this harangue the magistrates all bent their eyes upon Van Texel and silently awaited his reply. But excessive happiness deprived the young hero of speech. Rising to his feet, with tear bedimmed eyes, he thanked the Seigneur of Nordwyck with an eloquent gesture, and then sat down again.

But if he could have expressed his deepest thought it would have been in this wise:

"Thank God I have not suffered in vain!"

That night he became a member of the commandant's household, where he was honored as a distinguished guest. He remained there until he had fully recovered his health and strength. Then, one bright morning in the spring of the following year, he and Jacqueline proceeded quietly to the church of St. Pancras, where they were united in holy wedlock according to the rites of the Reformed Religion.

In concluding this chronicle, the fate of Count Marinus Deuterman must not be forgotten. During the investigation of his traitorous plot which the burgomaster speedily instituted, the house of the conspirators was searched, the underground tunnel discovered, and the mutilated body of the arch traitor found lying at the foot of the shaft. It was supposed that he had attempted to explode his mine from the farther end of the passage, and that the violence of the concussion brought down the roof upon him.

A QUEEN OF ATLANTIS.*

BY FRANK AUBREY.

A romance of the Caribbean Sea—Strange adventures among a people cut off from the rest of the world—Fantastic experiences in the land of the Flower Dwellers.

CHAPTER I.—THE PASSENGERS OF THE SAUCY FAN.

“GALLANT, saucy little ship. Is not this glorious?”

The words were spoken in tones of high enthusiasm by a girl of nineteen or twenty, who stood on the high stern of the brig Saucy Fan, which was reeling and tossing on the Atlantic rollers nearly half way out on her voyage from Liverpool to Rio de Janeiro.

“This boat, today,” the speaker went on, with a hand on the rail, and swaying easily with the tumbling vessel, “puts me, somehow, in mind of a little thoroughbred mare I used to have in our home in the Argentine. Without whip or spur she would carry you till she dropped, and she always seemed to glory in it all the while. And the Saucy Fan is just the same. She keeps on her way unceasingly, untiringly; struggling up and down the swirling waves just as Romping Chit would canter all day long over the green, rolling pampas. She never showed a sign of fatigue, and was just as full of fun, just as ready to break into a romping gallop at the end, as at the beginning of the day’s work. Don’t you enjoy a day like this, Mr. Wydale?”

Owen Wydale, the person thus addressed, was a well built, fine looking young fellow of some twenty five years. His sturdy, well set figure betokened somewhat of a military training; while the manner in which he managed to keep his balance, with hands quietly clasped behind him, showed that he was not unaccustomed to the sea.

“Just my feeling, Miss Dareville,” he replied. “This sort of thing has always had a great fascination for me.”

Since, however, he looked, while speaking, at his companion, it was not quite clear which “sort of thing” he referred to—the blue sky, the rocking vessel, and the white crested waves, on the one hand, or the captivating face and form beside him on the other.

For some minutes the two stood silently watching the great white crested billows as they darted past, hissing, and seething, and dashing, and surging against the vessel’s sides, and finally following one another into the line of foam that marked her wake.

On deck there were only the man at the wheel amidships, the burly skipper, who walked to and fro beside him, and a man in oilskins, who lounged in the bow.

Suddenly Vanina cried, "Look out!" and, with a merry laugh, dexterously ducked under a small canvas awning, just in time to escape a mass of water from a larger wave than usual. It had leaped up unexpectedly, just where they were standing, and came rattling on the deck with the patter of a hailstorm.

The squall carried away Wydale's hat, which disappeared over the bulwarks.

A moment afterwards a young boy, clad in waterproofs, emerged from the head of the companion that led down into the main cabin, and came toward them. He was a bright eyed, good looking youngster of between thirteen and fourteen, and he looked at the two with a smile as he approached.

Vanina extended a hand to him, and pushed him well under the shelter of the scanty awning.

"You had better keep close there, Georgy," she remarked; "we have just had a sea break over us."

"I know, sister," the boy replied. "We heard it down in the cabin, and Sydney sent me up to say he thinks the wind is freshening, and that you should come down."

"I, too, fancy it is getting rougher," put in Wydale. "Don't you think we should all do well to seek some better shelter, Miss Dareville?"

"Not I," the lady answered, with vivacity. "I love it! I think I was born with a love for the sea. But, as for you," she went on to Wydale, with another merry laugh, "you'll never make a sailor if you don't learn to keep a better lookout. You were fairly caught that time, and if I hadn't called out you would have been thrown upon the deck and been wet through. You should keep a sharper eye to windward. You had better go and find another hat."

"I've got one," Wydale answered, pulling a waterproof cap out of his pocket, and composedly putting it on his head. "The fact is," he went on, "I was too much engaged—after what you said just now about your little mare—in thinking of you—of how you would look——"

"Well—what?" she asked archly when he hesitated.

"On horseback—dressed as—as—as an Indian huntress, or—as—a warrior queen," he went on, laughing.

"Do you mean in a circus?" she demanded, a little stiffly.

"Oh, no, no! In real life—such as it used to be ages and ages ago," he returned hastily. "In the days when warrior princesses used to carry sword and shield, and ride in their chariots or on their war horses, into the thick of the battle—and—and—cheer on their soldiers—and—all that sort of thing, you know," he finished up—a little weakly, as he felt.

She looked earnestly at him, and drew a long, deep breath.

"Ah!" she said presently, "it is singular you should have such thoughts. That's how I feel myself sometimes. What put that into your head?"

"I scarcely know; something in your manner at times. You have the face—aye—and the figure, too, for it."

"I hope, all the same, that I don't look like an Amazon," she said. "For me, that kind of character has no attraction."

"No, do—Diana—or rather, perhaps, say, Boadicea."

"Leading a horde of savage ancient Britons clad in rough skins! No, thank you! I don't think that would suit me either."

Just then another young fellow came up the companion and called out:

"I want to have a word with you, Wydale. Do you mind coming down for a few minutes?" Then he turned and disappeared; and Wydale, with a brief word of apology to the young lady, followed him.

The brother and sister remained for a while silently watching the waves that were racing past. Vanina's thoughts returned to their former channel.

"I was telling Mr. Wydale, Georgy," she said, "how much I enjoy being at sea on a day such as this, and on board a boat like the Saucy Fan. How splendidly she goes through it! Almost like a well behaved yacht!"

"Ah!" returned the boy in a low tone, and with a serious face, "that is all very well, sister, when you are a passenger; but you cannot picture to yourself how very different this same vessel appears to you if you are a poor beggar of a cabin boy, as I was once here, you know. You can scarcely believe what a place they made it for me!"

Vanina took his hand, and pressed it tenderly.

"I know, poor boy," was her reply. "They must have ill used you indeed, to drive you to——"

"It was just such a day as this," he went on dreamily, "when I crawled out beyond the bowsprit yonder, the seas breaking over me every minute, to escape from the mate; and when Mr. Wydale came out after me and brought me back. It was a plucky thing for him to do, I can tell you. No one else on the whole ship would have risked it; and that ugly faced skipper over there, and his mate—who are so meek and mild to you today—stood looking on, and would have let the two of us drown for all they cared."

Vanina shuddered.

"I know, Georgy, dear," she said fervently. "But let us not talk about it now. It makes me turn quite sick. Certainly, I feel we can never, any of us, be sufficiently grateful to Mr. Wydale for what he did for you that day. He must be very brave, and very kind hearted too."

"Brave? He's more than that! He's—he's"—and the boy hesitated, and cast about for a simile; then wound up with, "he's a regular brick!"

Meanwhile, the subject of this little talk was seated in the cabin of the brig in close conference with the elder brother of the two, Sydney Dareville. He was a well built man of nearly thirty; had been at one time a sailor, and at another had seen service as an officer in one or other of the endless civil wars that are ever breaking out in the volcanic regions of South America. A little thinner than Wydale, and a little taller, he also exhibited somewhat more of the swagger and dash that characterize the ex soldier adventurer.

Ordinarily, one could read in his laughing eyes something of the merry, boyish, good humor of his young brother, mingled with the roguish high spirits that characterized his sister. Today, however, he was grave, and evidently disturbed in mind.

"Fancies or no fancies," he was saying, "I cannot put aside these feelings of vague suspicion and distrust that have laid hold of me. In my father's time

all our vessels were manned by honest, decent men. How has it come about that my precious stepfather and his present partner should send old and tried servants packing, to put in their places rascals like Durford, our cheerful skipper here, and Foster, his scoundrel of a mate, and the rest of our hang dog looking crew? Can you explain that to me?"

"That they are a bad lot—at least, with the possible exception of Peter Jennings, the ship's carpenter—I have good reason to know," Wydale agreed. "Still——"

"And what is that vessel behind us?" the other interrupted. "And why does she follow us as she has, taking in sail again and again, as I have seen with my own eyes, to keep in our wake when she had been overhauling us?"

"That may be but a fancy on your part; they may have feared foul weather. It has been squally and unsettled for some days. Of course, I can see what you are hinting at, but really cannot understand what any one would have to gain by such a crime. The cargo is ours, or ours and your friend Casella's jointly. The brig itself is partly yours——"

"Aye, this brig carries all I have left in the world to call my own," Dareville interrupted gloomily.

"And the insurance is made out in your joint names. Where, then, would be the gain to those you have in your mind?"

Sydney Dareville regarded his companion for a moment fixedly, then with a dry smile replied:

"What have they to gain? Nothing much on the ship and cargo, truly; but—if my sister and young brother were to die before coming of age—my respected stepfather would come into—fifty thousand pounds."

Wydale started, and looked incredulously at the speaker.

"I never heard of that," he murmured; "you never told me. I had no idea that your sister was—that is, that your brother and sister were——" He hesitated.

"You didn't know that Vanina was an heiress," Dareville answered, with a hollow laugh. "Yes, very much so, my friend. And now you can understand why it would suit certain persons very well indeed if the three of us went to Davy Jones' Locker as the outcome of this voyage. And you know why I am distrustful and uneasy, and want you to be watchful, and to help me to keep a sharp eye upon all that goes on. Now I must go up and fetch those two young people down. I can hear that the wind is getting up again."

CHAPTER II.—LEFT TO DIE IN THE SARGASSO SEA.

OWEN WYDALE'S presence on board the Saucy Fan this voyage had been brought about in a somewhat curious way. On her last voyage, which had been from Cape Town to Liverpool, he had shipped as the only passenger, and had had very unpleasant experience of the character of her skipper and crew.

He was returning to England after an absence of some years, during which he had knocked about the world a good deal, and had seen life under many varying phases. He had served for a year in the Cape Mounted Rifles,

and seen some fighting; he had shot lions and other "big game" in the depths of the African forest and out on the "veldt," and had, in one place and another, met with many strange adventures and hair breadth escapes.

His mother he had never known; his father had died a few years before, leaving to him—his only child—just enough to get along with and no more, and he had lost some of his capital by injudicious speculations in African mines. Hence, at the time referred to, when he was returning to England with a vague idea of "settling down" to some sort of occupation, motives of economy had induced him to take passage in a small sailing vessel instead of in a steamer.

He had been not long at sea, however, before he found cause to regret having chosen the Saucy Fan; not on account of any fault to be found with the vessel herself, but by reason of the behavior of the majority of those on board.

The skipper, Joseph Durford, and his chief mate, Steve Foster, showed themselves to be blustering bullies, cruel and unscrupulous towards those whom they thought it safe to subject to ill usage. In particular, they seemed to find a special delight in ill treating two young boys who had the misfortune to form part of the ship's company.

One—the younger of the two—was deaf and dumb; but even that affliction did not avail to save him from the brutalities of his tormentors. Wydale soon saw that the vessel was manned by a ruffianly crew, and that, while the skipper and his mate bullied everybody all round, the two lads included, many of the men joined in against the latter to wreak on them, in turn, the revengeful feelings they durst not show towards those above them.

The elder of the two boys strenuously tried his utmost to help and shield the younger. Many a blow did he receive that had been aimed at the other; but this chivalrous conduct, so far from exciting sympathy, as one would have expected, would only bring upon him further blows and thrashing.

Wydale viewed these proceedings with indignation and disgust, and had more than one stormy passage with both skipper and mate in consequence. He soon discovered that the two boys had been delicately nurtured; they had, indeed, run away from home, and hidden themselves as stowaways in the brig, just before she had left Rio de Janeiro for the Cape.

George, the elder—for the other could not speak—obstinately refused to give any account of themselves; and this was one thing that excited the ire of the skipper, who grudged every mouthful the youngsters ate. He worked on a profit sharing arrangement with the owners, it appeared, and would lose considerably by their being on board.

These, at least, were the statements he repeated, again and again, to Wydale; but the latter subsequently found reason to regard them with some doubt. At last, one morning, the deaf and dumb boy was missing. He had jumped overboard in the night, leaving a pitiful note behind him addressed to his brother, saying that he could bear his life no longer and concluding with a touching expression of hope that his brother would get on better without him.

Over this pathetic tragedy a stormy scene took place between Wydale and the skipper and his mate that almost ended in blows. Wydale's indigna-

tion led him roundly to accuse the two of deliberate murder, or what amounted thereto; and he declared his intention of laying information against them for that crime, or manslaughter, as soon as he got ashore.

The skipper retorted by threatening to put him in irons if he did not mind his own business and refrain from interference between him and those under his control.

One would have thought that the miserable end to which the little stow-away had been driven would have earned for the survivor surcease of ill usage—and it did for a few days, but for no longer. Then the old persecutions, the tormentings, the ropesendings began again, as bad as, even worse than, ever.

One thing was now noticeable, however; Foster, the mate, was almost alone in the matter. The others had, to some extent at least, felt sufficiently impressed by what had occurred to refrain from further brutal violence.

But Foster seemed possessed by an almost insane hatred of the lad; it looked, indeed—as Wydale bluntly told the skipper—as if the man were deliberately trying to drive the boy to follow the example of his unhappy brother.

One day the lad, to escape from his enemy, climbed out beyond the bowsprit on to the jibboom, where he clung in imminent peril of being washed off, loudly declaring he would drop into the sea unless a promise were given to ill treat him no more. Wydale, at great personal risk, climbed out after him and brought him back, just when he was on the point of dropping into the sea.

He had, in fact, already fainted, and would have fallen but that one arm had become jammed between the spar and the foretopmast stay. In this dangerous position the rescuer received aid from one man only, Peter Jennings, the ship's carpenter—the skipper, his mate, and several of the men standing about looking on and grinning.

After this episode, Wydale took the lad entirely under his protection, paying—though he could ill afford it—his passage money as a first class passenger; and thenceforth the boy was no more molested.

Leaving Wydale for the moment and turning to the three Darevilles, they were the daughter and sons of an Englishman, now dead, who had settled in South America many years before, and had been partly a ship owner, partly a rancher, with considerable estates in Brazil and Argentina.

After his death, Mrs. Dareville married Mr. William Blane, a man of whom little was known beyond the fact that he had made some money in Australia, and had joined the ship owning firm of Dareville, Armitage & Co., shortly before Mr. Dareville's death. After a year or two of unhappiness with her second husband, Mrs. Blane died, leaving to his care her three children by her first husband, Vanina, and two boys, George and Fred, the latter being deaf and dumb.

Sydney Dareville, the eldest son, having no great liking for his stepfather, and having inherited from his father a sum of money and a small share in the ship owning business, had left home some time before, and gone away to seek fortune or adventure, as the case might be. Some of his interest in the firm he sold, retaining only a small share.

Vanina was sent to England to finish her education. She would be enti-

tled, when of age, to a small fortune, her father having left a sum to each of his children on their attaining their majority, with the proviso that the shares of any dying before that event were to go to the survivors.

The reason given by her stepfather for sending her to England was that she might be educated so as to fit her for the position she would have to fill. But Sydney Dareville declared curtly, when he heard of the arrangement, that Blane merely wished to get her out of the way.

While away she received very unhappy letters from her two younger brothers, complaining of the unkind treatment they met with at the hands of their stepfather and a woman to whom he had confided them, and culminating in the announcement that after the tender affection of their mother, his unkindness was more than they could bear, and that they had resolved to run away.

Thus it came about that these two little unfortunates, by some strange chance—if there is such a thing in this world—hid themselves away in the first vessel that opportunity supplied, and this happened to be one of those partly owned by their dreaded stepfather. But of that they had no idea.

They had lived all their lives on the ranch, and had never seen a ship before; and, if they had heard that their late father had been a shipowner, it had conveyed but the vaguest notion to their young minds. When afterwards they had to face the skipper, they, or rather George—for the other could only speak by the deaf and dumb alphabet—said that their name was Simmons.

Beyond that they obstinately refused to give any account of themselves or of their friends or relatives. How they fared—how the poor little waifs fell out of the frying pan into the fire—has been already told.

Shortly after the two boys ran away, Sydney Dareville, tired of soldiering, came to Rio and called at the offices of the firm there to see his stepfather. He had resolved to sell out a further share in the firm, and invest the proceeds in a trading venture in partnership with a friend who had a commercial connection in the Argentine.

He was informed by the Rio agent that Mr. Blane had gone to Liverpool, partly upon business, and partly to arrange for his (Dareville's) sister to return home. It being part of Dareville's plan to go, in any case, to England, to select and purchase a shipload of miscellaneous goods, he followed him by next steamer, instead of going to their home; thus he failed to hear that his two young brothers had levanted, the agent being unaware of it.

Thus also it came about that when Owen Wydale, with his young protégé—concerning whom he felt very much perplexed, feeling that he could not well afford to take the boy's whole future upon himself—arrived in Liverpool, the lad's relatives were already in the town. Yet would he probably have missed them had he not gone to the office of the owners' agent, a Mr. Ridgway, to lay his complaint against the skipper and his mate.

George had told his new friend his real name, and such other particulars of himself as he knew; but they were not clear enough to lead Wydale to suppose that the boy's stepfather was one of the present owners of the vessel, even if he had known or remembered the name of the firm, which he did not.

His relations with the skipper had not been such as to lead to much talk between them during the latter part of the voyage. When, therefore, Wydale, accompanied by George, entered Mr. Ridgway's office, their astonishment was great at finding there Mr. Blane himself. That gentleman looked anything but pleased to see his stepson, and listened but coldly to Wydale's account of what had happened.

In reply to it he merely said he would think the matter over, refunded him the amount he had paid Durford for the lad's passage, and added that he would take future charge of him himself. George's terror at this was so extreme that Wydale hesitated as to what he ought to do; but when, a minute or two later, the boy heard that his brother and sister were in the town, he quickly brightened up, and Wydale then formally handed him over to his stepparent's custody, and returned to his hotel.

There, next day, came George, bringing Sydney and his sister, who thanked him in very different fashion from Mr. Blane's for his kindness to their brother, and quickly all became on friendly terms.

The two young men had many tastes in common; both had had some military training, and seen actual fighting; each had knocked about the world and met with adventures. Small wonder, therefore, that they soon became not only fast friends, but eventually partners in Dareville's projected trading venture.

It appeared that all Dareville had left of his former interest in the firm consisted of a half share in the Saucy Fan, and this he had been unsuccessfully endeavoring to sell to his stepfather. Therefore, he was in a quandary, not having sufficient capital to pay for his share of the cargo.

When Wydale was informed of this he readily offered to join and go out with him to seek fortune in the Saucy Fan, by which vessel Dareville had already arranged to take his cargo and his sister out together.

Wydale expressed some reluctance to sail again with the present skipper and crew, but Dareville laughed, declaring that he would either keep them in their places, or know the reason why. In any case, he said, he had not the power to interfere with the manning of the vessel; so Wydale reluctantly gave up the point.

But a short time before he could hardly have conceived it possible that he could have been induced to take another voyage in such company; now he would have made almost any sacrifice to sail in the same ship with Vanina Dareville, whose bright eyes and winning smiles had made a captive of him.

Thus the four had embarked together; and at first all had gone on as well as could be hoped for in the circumstances. The skipper gave up the chief cabin entirely to them, and lived in a deckhouse.

They had but little occasion to speak either to him or to his mate; but, when they did, those worthies showed themselves exceedingly deferential towards their part owner, and those with him. Yet the good little ship had not been long at sea before Sydney Dareville, as has been seen, began to entertain misgivings.

Moreover, just before sailing, at a time when it was altogether too late to alter their arrangements, he had come across an old friend who had expressed

grave doubts of Durford and "his gang," as he called them, hinting at dark doings in their former history.

But Dareville at the time had kept this to himself, and only mentioned it to Wydale now, because other incidents—each of little moment in itself, yet in the aggregate importing much—had occurred to make him feel uneasy.

This was his state of mind when he left the cabin to fetch the two on deck. He met them already on their way to join him, for the skipper had warned them that a "dirty" squall was coming up, and the crew was already shortening sail.

But, when it came, it proved to be much more than a squall; and it struck the gallant little ship before she was prepared to meet it, threw her for some minutes on her beam ends, and quickly stripped from her some of the canvas she had carried. For two days a heavy gale was raging, and the brig drove before the wind under almost bare poles, and going whither, no one in the cabin knew.

Scarcely one of them, in fact, stirred out of it. Fortunately, their respective sleeping cabins opened into it; as well as several tiny rooms used as store cupboards, in which were kept a few articles handy for use, such as potted meats, bread and biscuits, a cask of water, and so on.

Else might the little party have been starved; for no one came near them, save once or twice the skipper, who shouted down some unintelligible words about the hatchway, and forthwith went away. Once or twice, too, Owen or Sydney would venture on deck to take a look round; but since nothing was to be seen but a wild waste of tumbling waters and driving spray, they returned quickly to the shelter of the cabin.

On the afternoon of the third day the weather began to moderate, and Wydale and Dareville were able to pass a short time on deck. But the outlook was still dark and gloomy, they reported on their return, and night closed in on a still raging sea. But most curious—so Dareville thought—there astern could still be seen the vessel that had seemed to dog them. She must have somehow followed them even through the hurricane.

"I am glad to say," observed Dareville to his sister, when they had rejoined her, "that I think we shall all be able to take a good rest tonight. The sea is evidently going down, though slowly; and in the morning you should be able to get out of this stuffy place, and be on deck again."

"That will be a glad change, indeed," returned Vanina. "I had no idea the cabin of a ship could become so hateful to one. A few days more of this would go far to cure me of my fondness for the sea. I would much rather be on deck and face the weather."

Presently there were some knocks on the hatch above, and, on going to see the cause, Owen found the ship's cook bearing a pot filled with steaming coffee.

"Cap'n thought as maybe ye'd like a cup o' coffee apiece," he said shortly. "Couldn't boil nothin' afore; the sea kep' puttin' out the galley fire. You've got cups and saucers."

And with that brief explanation the man handed over the coffee pot and disappeared.

"H'm! It's little enough civility Durford has shown us," Dareville commented, with a laugh; "so I suppose we ought to think the more of this unexpected piece of politeness. Any way, a cup of coffee's welcome."

But its flavor failed to satisfy their expectations. It was only partly drunk, and voted disappointing, and fully half of it was thrown away. Shortly after the four retired to their respective sleeping berths, to take the first spell of unbroken rest they had enjoyed since the storm began.

In the morning Owen woke suddenly, and with a strange sensation of uneasiness. Almost immediately he heard Dareville's voice calling and asking whether he was awake. He had not taken off his clothes, so he stepped out at once, and both went into the main cabin. Everything was strangely quiet.

The vessel scarcely moved; she merely rose and fell on a slight swell, as though at anchor in a sheltered harbor. Beyond the soft splash of ripples and scarcely perceptible creaking of the cordage, no sound was to be heard.

No voices, no footsteps on the deck, nothing whatever to denote the presence of human beings. Wydale and Sydney stared blankly at each other; then, with a common impulse, made a rush up the companion and tried to open the hatch. It resisted all their efforts! Plainly the hatches had been fastened down upon them!

"What devil's trap is this we have fallen into?" exclaimed Dareville, in mingled fear and anger—fear for his helpless younger brother and sister more than for himself, and wrath at the trick that had been played upon them. Then came a staggering thought.

Had the wretches deserted the vessel, having first scuttled her, and left them there to die, stived up in the cabin like caged animals? Even now, while they were wasting precious moments, the vessel might be slowly filling through holes made by the scoundrels!

"Where's my rifle—and my revolver?" Dareville cried. "If they are within shot when we get on deck, I'll give them something to remember this business by!"

But when he went to look for his arms he found they had disappeared; so had Wydale's; and every cartridge with them.

Just then Vanina joined them. She read in their averted eyes that something serious had happened. Owen would have said a word to reassure her and sent her away, perhaps, but Dareville interposed.

"This is no time for mincing matters," he declared, "and she *must* know directly; for we must break our way somehow out of here, and my sister is no weak minded simpleton."

So he briefly explained what had occurred.

She fully justified his confidence, for she scarcely so much as winced, and her color never changed. She drew herself up with one of the proud flashes that at times would dart forth from her eyes, as though rebuking Wydale for his anxiety on her account, and said quietly:

"I see. I understand. If you think you can break open the hatch, do so at once. I will go in and talk to George." And she turned and left them.

Dareville could not repress a gesture of admiration, or of conscious pride, in the behavior of his sister.

"Told you so," he muttered, with a glance at Wydale. "She's a girl in a thousand for pluck." Then he went on, looking round: "And now, how to get that beast of a doorway open! And be on the lookout!

"For all it seems so quiet, some cowardly scoundrel may be lurking up there with a pistol to shoot us down the moment we show our heads. I've heard of such things before."

"So've I," said Wydale, between his teeth. "We've been two fools, Dareville, and ought to have known better, especially with a lady and a young lad in our charge. Two of us to look after them, and, with all, to fall into such a clumsy trap as this."

The other made no reply, and they both set to work, though cautiously. It took some time, and they had to break up some of the fitted furniture in the cabin to use as battering rams before they made much impression.

However, no one interfered and they heard no sound, and, after a time, they were able to raise the hatch a little way, and take a careful look round. Then they pushed it open and emerged on to the deck. Plainly the vessel was deserted; both the boats had gone. There had been three before the storm, and all had now disappeared.

Sydney called Vanina, who soon appeared, leading by the hand her brother, looking, as was but natural, very pale and scared.

"Confound their impudence!" exclaimed Dareville, gazing around him in astonishment. "What are they up to in all this? What in the name of all that's diabolical is their little game?"

The air was misty, and they could see no great distance whichever way they looked; but, so far as the view extended, there was nothing but one great field of green; they were surrounded on every side by a mass of seaweed.

Dareville stepped forward and tried the pumps. In a few minutes he came back, looking very thoughtful and perplexed.

"It's very odd," he said, "but the vessel's all right. Seems to be sound as a bell. At any rate, there's no water to speak of in the hold. They haven't even tried to scuttle her—so far as I can make out."

"Then what in the name of all that's wicked," asked Owen, "is the meaning of this trickery?"

But Sydney Dareville had had a twelvemonth on board ships some years before and knew more about the sea of that part of the world than Wydale did, and already an idea was forming in his mind that nearly froze his heart with horror.

Turning to the other two, he said lightly:

"Well, you two will have to play at being cooks now while we look after the ship. So go down and see what you can find for breakfast. It's clear there is no immediate danger."

Thus reassured, Vanina and her younger brother descended into the cabin and busied themselves in setting it to rights, and doing their best to prepare a meal.

But no sooner had they gone than Dareville took Owen by the arm and led him into the bows of the vessel, so as to be well out of hearing; then he turned and looked at him, his face all white.

"No immediate danger," he repeated, in a hard, bitter voice. "No; but may the great God above help us!"

"Why," Owen exclaimed, alarmed, "what do you mean? Where are we?"

"Where are we?" repeated the other between his teeth. "Why, hard and fast in the Sargasso Sea!"

"The Sargasso Sea. But what is that?" asked Wydale wonderingly.

"It is," said Dareville, in a despairing tone, "a place that has been called—and for only too good reason—the maritime graveyard of half the world. It is a gigantic trap, of such tenacity that if a vessel once gets caught in it, never will it let her go.

"Here, on all sides of us—if it were but clear enough to see—are untold scores of ships that have been caught and imprisoned, and have lain rotting for long ages; and here shall we also be held fast, to starve to death, and then lie and rot, as many and many another doomed wretch has starved, and died, and rotted here."

CHAPTER III.—A MARINE GRAVEYARD.

In the midst of the Atlantic Ocean, in the region lying between the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico on the west, and the west coast of Africa on the east is a vast expanse, never traversed by ship or steamer, and known as the Sargasso Sea.

It is so choked with seaweed that no vessel can sail, or row in it; and few who once get entangled ever return to tell the tale. There are, indeed, accounts of some who have attempted to explore this unknown waste, but none have succeeded in penetrating very far from the outer edge or fringe, and these adventurers experienced such difficulty in regaining the open waters as effectually to deter them from making any further expedition of the kind.

In more than one such case, indeed, the explorers almost gave up the hope of ever escaping from the weed's fatal embrace. These adventurers describe the region as unique in its strange isolation and oppressive silence and stagnation. Here no waves ever foam or tumble, no spray ever leaps into the air, flashing and glittering in the sunlight; no raging sea disturbs the everlasting calm.

But the calm that reigns unchallenged here is like unto the silence of the grave; it is, indeed, a veritable graveyard for unknown legions of the vessels of all nations. No doubt the greater part of the hulks here entangled are abandoned vessels—derelicts; no doubt, also, if they could be approached and boarded they would repay the adventurers with almost untold wealth.

Those who abandoned them could not have carried with them the cargoes, scarcely even any of the treasure they were freighted with. Those were indeed fortunate who escaped with life, for terrible tales are told—and with only too much probability—of vessels held fast in the tenacious grasp of the clinging weed, having still on board unhappy creatures whose fate one cannot contemplate without a shudder.

Such being the reputation borne by this dismal tract of weed strewn ocean,

it is small matter for wonder that Sydney Dareville, spite of the ready courage that was one of his foremost qualities, felt appalled at their position. Speculation as to the cause, and what had become of the skipper and crew, became a matter of but slight interest, compared with the grim fact of the hopelessness of their condition.

Nor need one feel surprised that he should have felt too utterly crushed, for the time being, to give his mind to plans for their escape. But Owen Wydale, of tougher stuff, would not abandon hope.

While talking, the two were startled by hearing a deep drawn breath behind them, and, looking round, saw Vanina standing near.

Yet, though her cheeks blanched when she grasped the danger they were in—for she had heard what had been said—the steady look in her candid eyes showed that she had no thought of breaking down beneath the trial.

"You here, Vanina?" exclaimed Dareville. "I thought you were——"

"I came up to ask you a question—but it does not matter now. I heard what you said. Can it be true? Is there nothing to be done?"

"I can see—can think of—nothing," he answered wearily, almost listlessly. "It is a cruel—an inconceivably cruel—cowardly business. If we had a full crew, and boats, and a good wind, even then it would be an almost hopeless undertaking to try to get out from here into the open sea. Situated as we are, you can judge for yourself."

Here Wydale, who had been looking hard in one direction, turned to go below, saying he "would be back directly." After an absence of a few minutes he returned, carrying a pair of binocular glasses and a telescope.

"The murdering, thieving hounds missed these, anyhow," he observed shortly, and fell to studying the scene before them, at one time through the glasses, at another through the telescope.

The position of the brig was this. She was surrounded on all sides by the tangled masses of weed, but, not far away in front of her—straight, that is to say, from her bows—was an open channel of clear water.

Up this she had doubtless drifted, and then, through a turn in the channel, had been thrown, either by the wind or her own impetus, into a sort of back-water; and this once entered, the weed had closed round her and held her fast.

The channel of open water was but a dozen yards or so away; but, in her present plight, she was as hopelessly shut off from it as though the distance had been a mile, or as though imprisoned in a great iron cage. This channel stretched away with a curve to left and to right, and was finally lost in each direction in the haze.

A dull, moaning noise in the distance indicated that the open sea was within hearing, and that waves were there breaking, probably upon some rocky reef; but the sound was so faint it was difficult to determine the side from which it really came.

Wydale had observed attentively all these points, and he now, as stated, studied the outlook carefully and patiently through the instruments he had hunted out. Then he laid them down, and again disappeared into the cabin.

The others took up the glasses, and through them viewed the expanse of green by which they were surrounded. Then Vanina gave a little cry.

"See!" she exclaimed. "See! What is that over there? 'Tis a ship in full sail! We can surely attract her attention."

Dareville turned his glass in the direction indicated, then laid it down with a gesture of despair.

"It is, as you say, a ship in full sail," he answered, with a shrug; "but she moves not, nor will she ever sail again. Judging by what I can make out, she has been standing thus, in full sail, for many a long day; only in this cursed sea of deadly calm no hurricane has ever come to blow her poor old sails away.

"If you look around you will see other miserable wrecks, mostly old, battered, decaying hulks. As well expect help from them as from yonder 'ship in full sail!' Even such a breeze as you can now feel, slight as it is, is a novelty—according to what I have heard—in this hope forsaken region."

And Vanina felt her heart sink while she listened to his words; and she laid the glasses down, infected, too, with his feeling of dull, cold despair.

Meantime Wydale had returned, carrying an armful of the broken pieces of furniture with which they had forced their way out of the cabin. These pieces of wood he began to throw energetically overboard, sending them far enough to fall beyond the weed into the open channel. Then he snatched up a pair of glasses, and attentively watched them. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

"I thought so!" he cried out. "See, Dareville! Look! Those pieces are floating away. Not fast; but you can see they are moving along. There is a current there. I thought just now I could detect it, but it runs so smoothly I could not feel certain. Now, however, you can see it clearly enough. See where that first piece has floated to? It's going faster now; that's because there's more current out in the middle. Jupiter! If we could but get out into that channel!"

Dareville laughed.

"What then?" he asked. "Firstly, we can't get there; secondly, do you think we could sail and tack the brig in a waterway thirty or forty feet wide, and with but two of us to manage her, too?"

"Don't you see," urged Wydale, disregarding his half contemptuous manner, "that that current *must* lead somewhere, and where to, if not the open sea? With but the least bit of 'way' on her, and this wind behind her, we might keep her in the middle of the channel; and that may be all we need do. I fancy the wind must have changed since she drifted in here. It blew her in here then; *now* it would take her back into the current."

"But how can we get her there?" said Dareville, looking over the vessel's side at the tangled weed. "If we only had a boat in that open water, now, and a live——"

"Let's get some sail on her, any way, and try," Wydale interrupted curtly. "The wind's the right way, and her head's lying the right way. If we can get her to move at all, it may not be so difficult."

Unfortunately, to bend a sail of any sort seemed just what could not easily be done. Many of the higher sails had been blown away; other lower ones seemed to have been deliberately cut away. There were none within reach that could be utilized.

"Where are the spare sails kept, I wonder?" Wydale asked as he realized all this. Then an idea occurred to him.

"Why, of course! George knows! Where's George? Call him up!" And George, who was below, soon put in an appearance. He had, under one arm, a bundle of wood, which he had chopped up to make a fire with, and in the other hand he carried an axe he'd found.

When informed of what was wanted, he entered into the business with alacrity, and, throwing what he was carrying into a corner, quickly showed them where the spare sails and tackle were to be found.

But it took an hour and a half to get even a couple of moderate sized sails hung out, in very unseamanlike fashion, on the lower yards. But the effect was small. The wind had freshened a little, and the brig yielded slightly to the pressure; but she made no decided way.

Wydale and Dareville got long poles and pushed desperately at the weed in an attempt to clear her bows, but they made no impression on it.

"If we could but get those royals out!" Wydale exclaimed, looking up aloft. These sails had been securely furled before the squall struck the vessel, and had escaped damage. "There's more wind up there."

"I believe we could do it," George declared.

"You!" Vanina exclaimed in alarm. She had been carefully watching all that was going on, and helping where she could. Breakfast had been long before forgotten; no one now thought of eating. Only water had been called for, for the day, though not sunny, was close and hot.

"I've had to do it before today in a rough sea," said George. "Surely I can do it now when she's as steady as a telegraph post! I believe it can be done."

"By Jove! but you're right, George," Dareville joined in. "Come on; I'll help lad! We'll do it between us!"

And in the result, after many patient attempts and much tugging and pulling, and many exclamations, "not loud but deep," from Sydney Dareville, followed by good tempered laughs from the boy, the sails floated out and were soon hauled taut, amid a little cheer from the two aloft, very heartily taken up by the anxious watchers on deck.

"She's moving!" Vanina cried out, in excitement. "Come down and help here now!"

The two "reefers" came scrambling down, and Dareville took up a pole and set to work to clear the rudder from the weed that clung about it, while Owen worked away with perspiring energy to clear the bows, and George and his sister together took in hand the management of the helm.

And slowly, inch by inch at first, but moving faster as she gathered way, the Saucy Fan crept, with a soft, brushing sound, through the greasy masses of weed, and finally, amid the breathless anxiety of those on board, emerged from it into the open channel!

"Hurrah! hurrah! Now, quick! Put her helm over—no, not that way—the other way!" cried Wydale.

"Starboard—no, I mean 'port!' Quick! Pull for your lives!" yelled Dareville.

Amidst these shouts and contradictory directions, the rudder was somehow got into its right direction, and the brig sailed freely and easily along the open channel.

"So far, so good," said Wydale, with a glance of triumph at Dareville. "This is better than sitting down and twirling our thumbs and waiting for starvation."

"Yes," Dareville assented, "you had the right ideas there, my friend. But now the question is, where are we going to? And if we get to the open sea, how do you suppose we two are going to manage a brig that needs a crew of eight or ten hands?"

"Let us hope—and pray—for the best," said Vanina gravely. "Surely Heaven that has helped us so wonderfully thus far will not desert us now!"

CHAPTER IV.—THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND.

THE brig sailed on smoothly, easily, with a silent, gliding motion, past endless fields of wood on every side, past many lonely wrecks and forsaken rotting hulks of what had once been stately, swift sailing, white winged ships. These forlorn relics were of all sizes, of all nations, and of every fashion of build known and unknown to those who looked upon them.

And the farther they sailed, the older became the type of vessel, till they came to what they took to be old Spanish galleons, and, later, to vessels of still more ancient build.

Scattered about were great beams and spars, and numerous small boats, and in the latter—as well as on the decks of some of the larger craft—could be seen, every now and then, little white heaps—all that was left, it was but too painfully obvious, of the bleaching bones of hapless victims of the dread sea of Sargasso.

Inexpressibly sad, terribly solemn and impressive, were these relics, as they came quietly into view, and passed, silent and ghost like, out of sight.

Never, perhaps, has human eye gazed upon scenes more awfully desolate or more eloquent in their weird stillness and slow, unfailing decay. But soon the attention of the watchers was, perforce, drawn away from these mute memorials of an unknown past to the question that now forced itself upon their minds, "Where were they drifting to?"

Wydale had observed, first with growing surprise, then with alarm, the fact noted above, *viz.*, that the rotting wrecks around them became of a more and more ancient type the further they proceeded.

Then he and Dareville happened to glance at one another, and with that the same thought struck each: "Did it not appear as though they were journeying steadily, not to the open sea—as they had fondly hoped—but towards the very heart of this dreary wilderness of weed?"

It had been long after noon when they sailed out into the channel. It was now within an hour of sunset. They could not go on like this in the dark! What was to be done? But just when Wydale, who was steering, called Dareville to him for a whispered consultation, fresh surprises broke upon them.

First the channel along which they were sailing began to widen; then the mist began to clear, and soon they saw dim shapes that rose high in the air straight ahead; these gradually took forms resembling the lofty towers of some mighty castle glistening in the evening sunlight. Slowly, for a while, the mist lifted, then suddenly cleared quite away.

At the same time the channel ended, opening into a large expanse of water that spread out for a mile in front of them, and for two or three miles to their right and left. And now they saw that what they had taken for Titanic towers were the lofty peaks and cliffs of an island that lay sleeping and smiling, with its green woods and sandy shore, in the ruddy gold gleams of the setting sun!

A wondrous scene! A fascinating, an enchanting scene! And the four on the deck of the gliding vessel gazed upon it as though spellbound, too astonished, too enraptured, to utter so much as a single word.

Before them was a bay shut in by towering, precipitous rocks that, at each end, came down almost straight into the sea. But towards the center, they receded, forming a natural amphitheater with a wooded ravine in its midst that mounted up, terrace upon terrace, towards the cliffs that rose still higher in the background.

In front of the woods, and in strong contrast to their deep olive tone, was seen the vivid green of a wide strip of greensward, and, in front of this again, a broad belt of tawny colored sand.

Through the wood tossed and foamed a torrent of rushing water, while, from the cliffs around, leaped foaming cascades, all finding their way, eventually into the waters of the bay. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of all this fairy scene was the castellated rocks that reared themselves in stately fashion high above the hanging woods.

These shone as though of glass—or crystal, and, in the setting sun, glittered and sparkled with tints of dazzling brightness. But all was still upon this island, save for the distant murmur of the falling water and the lap of tiny ripples against the sides of the brig not a sound was to be heard, and no sign of human presence was to be seen.

"Well!" said Dareville presently, drawing a long breath. "We've got somewhere at last, any way! And it strikes me that unless we mean to run down this charming island, we'd better take in sail—or let go the anchor."

"We shouldn't hurt much if we did run ashore on that sand," said Wydale. "However, as we don't know what sort of people live here, and what kind of reception they might give us, perhaps we'd better try to anchor out here for the night."

"Then we can see about landing in the morning. The breeze has died away; we might let the anchor go first, and take in the sail afterwards—or leave it as it is all night for the matter of that," he added, with a laugh. "We can't possibly hurt here if we get a good anchorage."

With some trouble they let the anchor go, and the cable ran out with a rattle that was echoed again and again from the opposite rocks, almost like distant thunder.

The sound somewhat startled them, and they gazed anxiously along the shore to see whether the noise had caused any movement in the place to show

it was inhabited. But though they looked closely and carefully through the glasses, they saw no trace of a living creature.

The anchor held, and the brig swung easily at the cable end, about a quarter of a mile from land.

"What place can it be?" asked Wydale, much perplexed, while they leaned on the rail and watched the scene that was growing dimmer in the fast deepening twilight. "Can it be, do you think, that this is one of the West Indian Islands, and that, after all, it was the Caribbean Sea—not the Sargasso Sea—that we came through?"

"Shoo! No, man!" returned Dareville. "I've been through the Caribbean Sea—and more than once. There's weed there, but nothing like what we've come through today.

"Besides, there are no wrecks lying about *there*. This is the Sargasso Sea, right enough; but what this place in the midst of it can be passes my wit to understand."

"What place—what island can it be?" Vanina asked in growing wonder.

Suddenly George clapped his hands. A reminiscence of his *Lempriere* came into his mind.

"I know!" he burst out. "I know! It must be so!"

"What?" queried his sister.

"Atlantis! The lost island of Atlantis!" he declared enthusiastically.

At this they all laughed heartily, and, it being now nearly dark, they turned slowly to go below to light the cabin lamp, and, at last, get something to eat.

In these latitudes there is but little twilight such as we are accustomed to in England. So soon as the sun goes down, almost instantly it is dark. By the time they reached the cabin stairs they had to grope their way.

"I think," suggested Wydale, "it would be as well to stuff something into all these ports, and so show no light. If there should be any hostile natives watching us, and thinking of coming off in canoes, it will be more difficult for them to find us in the dark."

"Don't," cried Vanina, with a shiver. "You upset me again; just, too, when I had got over our terrible fright of the morning."

"It's only a reasonable precaution, though," said Dareville; and the idea was carried out. This work done, he turned to his sister with the words, "We're not out of the wood, yet, you know.

"Other things apart—if, that is to say, there are no disagreeable inhabitants here, and we don't starve—we don't want to live on a forsaken, desert island all our lives. And for us, unaided, to work this brig out, and back to a port, is a simple impossibility."

This being obviously true, the reminder once more depressed the spirits of the little party, so that they ate their scanty meal almost in silence. Presently, when it was finished, George, full of boyish curiosity, stole quietly up the companion to take a look round. A minute later, his voice was heard calling to the others to come up; and in a few seconds all were again on deck.

"Look, look!" cried the boy excitedly. "The whole place is on fire!"

It was not exactly that; but it certainly looked like it. All around, the water was brilliantly phosphorescent; every tiny ripple was a glowing wavelet

of light, that turned the whole area of water into a lake of fiery, waving lines, fringed, where the ripples lapped the shore, with brighter bands.

"Whatever does it all mean?" Vanina whispered in an awestruck voice.

"The stagnant water," Dareville began oracularly, "in this sea of weed, is full of animalculae, and is strongly phosphorescent. That's——"

"Ah, yes! *that* we can understand," said she, cutting short his intended speech, "I have read it somewhere in a book. But I never heard of such a thing with falling water like this.

"Besides, you see it is only the case with one or two. The other streams are like ordinary water, quite different from those extraordinary fiery torrents. And those flashing lights, too, what can they be? Is the whole island a volcano in eruption?"

But against this suggestion there was the fact that there were none of the phenomena that go with such eruptions—no noise, no sign of ashes, smoke, or escaping sulphurous gases. Save for the murmuring of the falling water, the whole scene was as still as when they first looked upon it by daylight.

But before any theory or explanation could be advanced by any one of them, their attention was drawn away from the shore by a sound in the opposite direction. It was at first only perceptible as a slight distant rushing and splashing in the water.

Gradually it increased in volume, until it became a kind of low, dull roaring, like the advance of an immense wave; and, mingled with other sounds, could now be heard snorting and strange noises as of a whale, or some such ocean creature, swimming or struggling, in violent fashion, along the surface of the water.

Moving quickly to the opposite side of the deck, the watchers could see a veritable fiery fountain advancing down the channel along which they had sailed earlier in the day. It soon became clear that some great denizen of the deep was making its way towards them, with much tumbling and splashing, and many violent plunges, which sent the phosphorescent water leaping in showers into the air, to fall back in glittering drops upon the gleaming waves around.

In a little while, the cause of the disturbance had come out of the channel into the open water, and approached so close to the vessel that it was possible for those on board to make out what was going on. And this is what they saw:

A great sword fish, of extraordinary bulk, though armed with a terrible looking "sword" of at least five feet in length, was struggling in the grasp of a gigantic cuttle fish. The latter had two of its arms twined like lithe snakes round the body of the fish.

The four onlookers were too much surprised and fascinated by the spectacle to move or even speak. While they watched, they could see that the sword fish was growing weaker, and that gradually more of the arms of the cuttle were coiling round it.

Suddenly, a new sound was heard of some other great body tearing through the water, and another immense cuttle fish rushed across the bay to the assistance of its mate. It came shooting along the surface, leaving a

brilliant path behind it, like a rushing rocket, and launched itself into the fray with a ferocity fearful to behold.

To assist its attack, it threw two or three of its great arms round the stern-post of the brig, and, with the purchase thus obtained, it laid hold, with the other arms, of the struggling sword fish and dragged both the antagonists bodily towards it, shaking the vessel from stem to stern in its exertions. Gradually, the struggles of the victim ceased, and one of the cuttles raised its body out of the water.

When its great bulk, with the monstrous, gleaming eyes, as large as saucers, rose above the surface, Vanina, horrified, yet too frightened to move, could not repress a scream. This seemed to awake Wydale and the others almost as from a trance. With a vague idea that she was in danger, the former rushed forward, picking up the axe which he knew George had that morning laid down near the fore-castle, and returned quickly with it to her side. And he was only just in time.

The other two had started from the bulwarks out of sight; but Vanina seemed fascinated by the awful hideousness of the creature, and remained staring over the side. Evidently the monster had caught sight of her and scented further prey, for, like a flash—more quickly even than the python seizes upon the swift footed antelope—a long, dark, writhing “tentacle” darted over the rail and twined round her body.

But even before the cry that rose to her lips was heard, Owen’s axe had fallen upon the slimy limb and severed it just where it crossed the bulwark; the next moment the part that had taken hold upon her fell, now harmless, on to the deck.

Another tentacle flashed across with lightning quickness, this time aimed at Wydale, coiling round his arms in such a manner as to pinion them and prevent him using the axe. Immediately he was, in his turn, dragged against the bulwarks, and he felt himself, despite his struggles to release himself, being lifted irresistibly off his feet; then other arms of the monster were put forth, stretching out ravenously to seize him.

Fortunately, Dareville saw his friend’s great peril and retained his presence of mind. He snatched the axe from Wydale’s now powerless hand, and, with a swing, brought it down, as Wydale had but a minute before, cutting through the second tentacle. The severed portion fell limp and motionless beside the other piece, and the two great cuttles, with a loud splash and a mighty plunge, made off, carrying with them the captured sword fish.

When Wydale turned to thank his friend, he saw that he was, assisted by George, already half leading, half carrying his sister towards the cabin; so he slowly followed them, without stopping to examine the hideous trophies of the encounter that lay on the deck.

CHAPTER V.—A DESERTED CITY.

It was a gloomy, almost silent, little party that sat down to breakfast the following morning in the chief cabin of the Saucy Fan. The two young men had had little sleep, having passed the night, for the most part, in whispered

consultation. Ostensibly they were supposed to be keeping watch and sleeping by turns, while Vanina and her younger brother slept on undisturbed; but, as a matter of fact, they only carried out this arrangement when the night was three parts spent.

Naturally they were anxious and depressed, though, be it said, more on account of the other two than on their own. Had they but been alone, the spirit of daring and adventure that animates most young Englishmen would have caused them rather to rejoice in than to regret the chance that had placed them in so strange a situation.

But placed in an unknown part of the world, inhabited, perhaps, by savage tribes, as it certainly was by grim and ferocious monsters, what chance had they, without firearms, of being able to protect themselves and those with them, if attacked? And then there was the question of food.

Of arms they had practically none; and the reliance of civilized man, in these days, upon firearms is so universal that it is astonishing how helpless he becomes without them, when the need arises to defend himself.

No wonder, therefore, that the two on whom the safety of the whole party rested felt oppressed by the sense of their own helplessness. If they were not to starve to death, the food they already had in the brig must be supplemented by supplies of some kind from the land and sea around them; that was clear.

But to obtain these exploration was essential; and to explore an unknown country without arms is about as severe a test of the civilized man's courage and resource as they can well be subject to. Both Wydale's and Dareville's thoughts ran continually upon the difficulty they had here to face, for both knew there were no arms amongst the cargo.

Presently, while they sat at breakfast, Vanina broke the silence with a little laugh. The others looked up in surprised inquiry.

"I was thinking," she explained, "how very much I must have fallen in Mr. Wydale's estimation last night. He said once he thought I had the face and figure of an Amazon——"

"Not at all," Owen hastily interrupted. "I did not say 'Amazon;' I said 'Warrior Queen.'"

"Ah, well, it's the same thing here. I fear I did not show more pluck or spirit than the proverbial woman confronted by a mouse."

"The occasion was exceptional," Wydale returned gravely. "It was something more than a mouse that attacked you."

"Many a man so situated would have given way to panic. You, at least, did not do that; and you did not faint. You behaved extremely well, I think."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," she replied more seriously. "I feel we shall have many dangers to face here; and this is no time for a woman to give way to 'nerves.' You shall find me different in future—at least I hope so."

"But, you see, last night the incident was so sudden, the sight of the horrid monster so unexpected, and it looked doubly, trebly ghastly lighted up so fitfully and strangely by the beams from the splashing water. Ugh! I can see it even now."

She shuddered and passed her hand before her eyes as if to shut out the sight. After a pause she went on: "But in future I mean to be brave."

"It will only be your natural spirit, sister, if you are," George interrupted. "Don't you remember that time when the rattlesnake——"

She interrupted him quickly in her turn. "Never mind that now, George. We have something else to think of. Are there then no arms amongst the cargo?"

Sydney Dareville sighed disconsolately.

"No," he said, with a troubled look, "that's the worst of it. There are none at all."

"None—absolutely *none*?" Vanina repeated.

"None, I am sorry to say. You see——"

"But what *is* in the cargo?" then she went on. "Most of it belongs to you and your friend, you told me—and Mr. Wydale saw it all put in. Are you *sure* there may not be a case of revolvers and cartridges?"

Sydney shook his head. "I feel more vexed and upset about it than you can think," he explained; "for it is my fault that there are none; at least," he added, hesitating, "it was more Ridgway's than mine."

"Ridgway's!" exclaimed Vanina in surprise.

"Why, yes; this was how it was. Mr. Cassella gave me a list of articles I was to be sure to ship. As to others, he left that to my discretion. Well, I thought of a lot of other things sure to sell well out there, and amongst them firearms of different kinds.

"But when I spoke to Ridgway he advised me not to take anything in that line. He said they were themselves sending a consignment, and that therefore it would not be worth our while. So I struck out the firearms."

"But how were they sending them?" Wydale asked.

"That I can't say," replied the other, and then paused thoughtfully. "Do you know," he went on, after a short space, "I couldn't understand Ridgway at all. I am half inclined to think he was playing some game of his own, that even the partners in the firm knew nothing of."

"How do you mean? what sort of a game?"

"Ah, that I do not know. But there was something mysterious in connection with the Saucy Fan before the cargo was stored in her; and, strange to say, I don't think Blane was in it. That Blane is a scoundrel, a would be, cold blooded murderer—it's no use mincing the fact, Vanina—we all know too well; and I don't believe much in either Armitage or Ridgway.

"But what I really fancy is that, while the other two were planning a deep and wicked game of their own, Ridgway was busy on another of *his* own. Those mysterious hints that I received, I am convinced they were well founded, in the light of what has since occurred."

"I see—or at least I think I begin to understand—a little," said Vanina musingly. "That there must have been a plot is clear. You think there may also have been an underplot of Ridgway's.

"I wish I could think better of my stepfather; but I cannot. But no more on that score now; what I want to know is, what *is* the cargo? You forget you haven't told me yet."

"We have lists of everything," replied her brother, laughing, "and it will amuse you to hear what that consists of. Never, I should say, if you except

firearms—was a more comprehensive list of articles, useful and the reverse, carried by any ship that ever sailed.”

“Let us know first what ‘useful’ things you have,” Vanina said. “The rest can wait.”

“I’m afraid I can’t; they’re all so mixed up in the lists.” Dareville pulled out a pocket book. “See here, for instance. This is only one short list. It relates to a few articles for a customer of Mr. Cassella’s—a showman—keeps what they call in America, a ‘Dime Museum.’

“I suppose the novelty of his show was wearing off, and the dollars were not pouring in quite so fast; so he asked us to send him out a few waxworks of celebrities who, though tolerably well known in Europe, would attract out there, and anything else we thought might draw.

“Here are some of his consignments—penny in the slot machines, with working models and so on; a few fireworks; some stuffed animals from Africa, magic lanterns, and dissolving views apparatus with a case of slides; Mary Queen of Scots——”

“Mary Queen of Scots!” Vanina cried. “What’s that? Now you are laughing at me, Sydney.”

“Upon my honor, no. He wanted new waxworks, you must know, and was very particular that we should include Mary Queen of Scots and Lucretia Borgia. You know Lucretia Borgia has been whitewashed——”

“Lucretia Borgia whitewashed?”

“Certainly! Haven’t you read all about it? Every historic villain gets whitewashed nowadays. Any way, it’s the case with her, and it’s roused up a new interest in the lady over there. But, besides Mary Queen of Scots, there are, amongst the waxworks, a model of ‘The Sleeping Beauty,’ and some of the kings and queens of England—a few old ones, I believe, to take the place of some that have got damaged. There’s King John, and Richard Coeur de Lion, and Boadicea, the famous British Queen, resplendent in a suit of mail, with a helmet on her head and brandishing a spear, *à la Britannia*——”

Here Wydale glanced with a mischievous smile at Vanina, who flushed up.

“Oh, leave that, and go on to other things,” Vanina interposed.

“Very well,” agreed Sydney, glancing down his list. “Here are some more of the items. First, there are some pianos and musical instruments of various kinds, including musical boxes; then come cutlery—knives and forks and so on—and crockery; there are umbrellas, and boots, and shoes; paint boxes and cameras, and photographic, as well as chemical, apparatus; telephones and phonographs; a large collection of mounted photographs of objects and places of interest in Europe; there are rat and mouse traps, and watches and clocks; opera and field glasses, and telescopes; there are reaping and mowing machines, and an ice making machine——”

“I wish we could put it into use and have some ice here,” sighed George.

“You can’t get at it; it’s half way down in the hold. Then there’s a case of stationery, pens, paper, ink, a large number of books of various kinds, and even a small hand printing press; there’s a portable steam engine and boiler, and a steam launch——”

"A steam launch; can't we get at that?"

"By and by. If we can find anything to feed it with it may be useful. Either coal or petroleum can be used as fuel. There are diving dresses, and some wood cutting machinery.

"There are harpoons and 'tubes' to shoot them from—but useless without powder; a large quantity of oiled silk—intended for the construction of a war balloon, I fancy, and some life saving rockets. These last are packed away at the very bottom, else we could get them out. They might be useful on occasion instead of firearms."

When he had finished, Vanina remained silent a while. Then she observed:

"As you said, a curious collection. And to think that amongst it all we have no arms!"

"Yes; and no clothes either," George put in.

"You're right, Georgy," agreed Sydney. "Ah! it's a great oversight; almost-as bad as the absence of arms. If, for instance, this island should prove uninhabited, and we have to spend here the remainder of our lives—or even a few years—what on earth shall we do for clothes?"

"To be sure, there are the dresses of the wax figures. But it would be funny, wouldn't it? Fancy Wydale and myself, for instance, strutting about in this lovely island, dressed as King John and Richard Coeur de Lion, and—you—Vanina as—as——"

"As Boadicea, the warrior queen," edged in Wydale, laughing and looking at Vanina. "It'll have to come to that, after all, I do believe! It's fated. Many a true word's spoken in jest, you know."

And Vanina colored up and rose hastily from the little table. Then the "council" broke up and they set seriously to work to solve the problem that lay first before them—how to get ashore to explore the land around without running the brig aground. In the absence of a boat it was not an easy matter to accomplish. However, they managed to shift the anchor near the shore and get the vessel close in at the very end of the cable. Thus they would be able to pull her out into deeper water, if occasion should arise, by simply winding in the cable.

Then they set to work to make a raft, and on this Wydale and Dareville made their way to the shore, taking with them a stout line attached to the brig's stern. This, when they landed, they proceeded to make fast round a great boulder that lay on the beach.

This sufficed to hold the vessel steadily in the position that was most convenient to them in the circumstances, and also enabled trips to and fro on the raft to be more easily made, since they had only to ferry themselves across by holding on to and pushing against the rope.

By the time this work had been completed, they were well into the afternoon, and it was clear that very little more could be done that day. It was deemed advisable, however, to take a look round the bay; in particular, to search about for signs of natives.

A hunt through the brig for arms had brought to light only two more axes and an old, half rusty cutlass. They discovered also a small keg of

gunpowder, brought, no doubt, for use with the brass carronade that was carried in the bows. All other ammunition the crew had taken away.

"Just enough powder for a few charges, I reckon; but no shot of any kind," muttered Dareville, in disgust. "We might cast some rough shot possibly—we've plenty of lead on board—and thus we might find the little cannon of some use, if there are savages here. But we can't carry it about with us."

In the end the piece was loaded with powder only; a few pebbles of the most appropriate shape obtainable were selected and put aside to use as shot if needed. For signaling purposes the explosion of the powder only would suffice.

Owen and Dareville drew lots to decide which should start first upon the work of exploration. It fell to the latter, and it was agreed that he should take up the task that day and the next, and that then, if occasion called for it, Wydale should devote a day or two to going still farther afield.

In the trips to and fro on the raft, a sharp lookout was kept for the dreaded cuttles; but no more was seen of them.

Just before sunset Dareville returned, bringing with him a number of oranges he had found growing wild. He had traversed the bay from end to end at each point, being prevented from going farther by the rocks that ran out into the sea.

Then he had ascended the ravine by the side of the watercourse which flowed down it, and after a stiff climb over the cliffs at the top had obtained a view of an extensive country lying beyond in a sort of basin.

He had also seen a lake in the distance, and what looked like buildings beside it. But it having been agreed that he should return before dark, he had then retraced his steps to the shore. Of inhabitants he had come across no sign.

"But," he observed, "the place either is inhabited or *has* been. It may now be deserted by those who once lived here, but I am confident that the way by which I ascended was once a path and made by man. There are groves, too, as of trees that had been carefully planted and tended in former years, but now it is all overgrown and gone to ruin.

"It was there I gathered the oranges; they are only half wild. There were other fruits, too, which I could not reach, and were quite near to me. Tomorrow I propose to start at dawn and go to the lake I saw, and ascertain whether there are really any buildings there. It may have been a mirage.

"All that we know is this: we are here on a tropical island in the midst-of the Sargasso Sea, an island whose existence has never been suspected, an island, too, that has been, and may be still, inhabited. Therefore I advise that we all stick closely to the ship so far as may be possible till we know more about the place."

"What makes those cliffs up there shine and sparkle so?" Vanina asked.

"Ah! I forgot that. The rocks are almost wholly crystal; some quite clear and white or colored—transparent as glass—some opaque and semi opaque; but all beautiful in the extreme. I have never seen anything like it."

"And what of the falling water that is luminous at night?" asked Owen.

"I could not get to it; it falls from an orifice in the face of a precipice of the crystal rock, at the back of a deep fissure."

"And you saw no animals, small or large?"

"Well, yes, some small ones; rabbits, or something of the kind. I saw some snakes, too. These and some birds were the only signs of life."

The night passed without incident, and at dawn—which appeared a little before six o'clock—they were all astir; and then Sydney, after an early meal, prepared to start upon a further journey of discovery. This time he slung a bag over his shoulders, and in it placed some provisions for the day.

"And it will be useful," observed Vanina, referring to the bag, "to bring back some more oranges in. Mind you fill it; those you brought us last night were delicious."

"Yes," Wydale added. "And if you could only knock over two or three rabbits, or some birds, or something to provide us with a little fresh meat, it would be better still. Oh, for a fowling piece!"

During the day Wydale and the others occupied themselves in many ways. With some of the spare sails they rigged up an awning over the deck. Then they started fishing and caught a good supply, some of which they cooked, and, finding them good to eat, captured some more, to be ready for a meal for Sydney when he returned. Next they went along the shore in search of oysters, and returned laden with as many as they could carry.

In the afternoon, Owen and Vanina found themselves sitting, somewhat tired, under the awning, watching George, who was still hunting about for oysters in the water, with bare legs and feet, a short distance away.

"Do you think," Vanina laughed, "that we shall really have to pass the remainder of our lives out here, as Sydney was so dismally prophesying yesterday?"

Owen shook his head and sighed.

"Who can say?" he answered. "It may turn out so. It needs no special knowledge to see that the difficulties for working the brig out are practically insuperable.

"Still, we sha'nt starve, that is now clear. And, since that is so, I would not, myself, very much care, if only——" He paused and sighed again.

"If only—what?" Vanina asked, glancing at him with the roguish look that, at times, came into her eyes.

"If only I knew how much you liked me," he returned impulsively.

"You are bold, Mr. Wydale," said his companion, looking down in a thoughtful way. But she did not seem displeased, so Wydale thought, and he felt encouraged to go on.

"Bold or desperate—call it which you will," he said, with sudden passion. "You must well know how I feel towards you. From the first moment I saw your portrait in the hands of your young brother the day I first took charge of him I have been madly in love with you, and every day since has made me——"

"Hold!" she said, lifting up her hand. "You must not say such words to me. And you talk foolishly, too."

"You declare you—well, say—liked me since first you happened to see my portrait, and you assert that I must 'know' it. But how could I possibly know anything of the kind?"

She spoke softly, and gazed dreamily across the bay at the green woods and cool looking stream that lay smiling in the sunlight.

"Know?" repeated Wydale, seizing her hand in his. "Ah! you know only too well. You saw it the first time I fixed my eyes upon you. You have seen it ever since, in every look I have given you, every word I have spoken, every—oh, Miss Dareville—Vanina—speak to me—say something to end this suspense—tell me—tell me—do you—do you—like me a little?"

He had passed an arm round her and drawn her closer, she not resisting. George had gone up out of the water to the shade of some trees further away, where he was busy putting on his shoes and stockings. Screened as they were by the bulwarks, he could not see how they were engaged.

Owen drew her closer, and still she did not resist. She could even feel his breath upon her cheek; it blew about a few stray hairs, and she knew he was gazing at her with eager eyes; but she avoided meeting them.

"Of course I *like* you," she replied, looking down and toying with the end of a rope that hung from the rail. "Who could help doing so, after what you did for Georgy? We are both grateful, and——"

"For Heaven's sake, Vanina, do not trifle with me!" Owen burst out. "Grateful! Do you suppose I am talking now about gratitude? You know I am not. Still," he went on more calmly, and with sadness in his voice, "I know that perhaps I have no right to address you thus.

"I am poor, and you, I have been told, are rich; and it might seem wrong of me to speak, only that we are thrown here into a strange place, and may never see the old countries again. That seems to me to alter matters greatly. It was *that* that made me speak," he added rather apologetically, "and if I have offended you——"

She turned to him with a flushed face and one of her wonderful smiles.

"No," she said, "you have not offended me. One who acted as you did towards Georgy could hardly offend me. But don't you think you are acting very foolishly, and—prematurely?"

"We don't know what may be before us, what perils may be in store for us. Is this a time and place to talk in such a style, dear friend? Cannot we be close friends—*dear* friends even, if you will—without talk of love?"

She looked so charming, so enticing, that Owen could not resist a sudden impulse.

"Be it so for the present," he said gaily, "we will be friends—*dear* friends—but you will seal the bargain with a kiss?" and he drew her face to him and kissed her.

Up sprang Vanina, but what she was about to say remained unsaid; for just then they heard George's voice, and saw him get up and come towards the shore in the direction of the ship.

"Here is Georgy," Vanina said, looking at Wydale with a flushing face.

"The meeting then broke up in some confusion," he quoted, looking at her mischievously, "and it hereby stands adjourned, until——"

But she had moved away and was calling out to George, who had now come within speaking distance. And so it was that no date was fixed upon for the resumption of this important conference.

Towards evening Dareville returned, and he brought back strange intelligence of a deserted city he had discovered beside the lake he had seen in the distance on the previous day.

"It is a wonderful place," he told them, "simply wonderful! Full of ancient temples, and palaces, and buildings that must once have been of great magnificence and beauty, but now are falling into ruins.

"They look, nevertheless, as if they had only been abandoned in quite modern times; perhaps but a few years ago. I saw traces of ornamental gardens, of parks, groves and fields and meadows. On all sides there are evidences of former careful cultivation, but none, that I could detect, of living people."

"Where, then, can they have gone to—and when?" Vanina wondered.

The question could not be answered. But it afforded ample food for speculation for the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER VI.—THE VAMPIRE.

WHEN, the following morning, Owen prepared to set out on a further reconnoitering expedition, according to the arrangement that had been come to, George begged very hard to be allowed to bear him company. At first this was refused, but, after some discussion, leave was granted.

They had now all come to the conclusion that the place was uninhabited; that there was therefore no danger to be apprehended from hostile natives. An hour after dawn they started, Wydale taking with him, as Dareville had the day before—only an axe, and the old cutlass by way of arms, the marine glasses, and some bags containing food.

They mounted, without much difficulty, the rough path beside the water-course, and found their way over the cliffs at the summit. It was somewhat arduous work: more by reason of the heat of the sun than from the difficulties of the road itself. These would have been greater but for the track which had been constructed at some former time.

They thus found their way easily enough to the heights; and there the path led them through a kind of pass, flanked on each side by still higher rocks of glittering crystal, that led to the edge of the plain or basin that lay beyond.

Here an extensive prospect opened out before their eyes, and far away they could see the lake that had been described, glistening like a sheet of burnished silver in the sunlight. It lay far below, and the road to it—which was still fairly clear and easy to follow—skirted the margin of a stream that tumbled and foamed as it leaped from rock to rock.

The heat increased as the sun rose higher in the heavens, and the two were often glad to make a halt under trees on the river bank to rest and enjoy drafts of the clear, cool water, or to eat one of the oranges they had plucked upon their way; for of this fruit there was a plentiful supply. As they drew nearer to the lake, the ruined buildings of the deserted city came more

clearly into view, and, after a march of nearly three hours from the time of leaving the shore, they reached them.

It certainly was, as Dareville had described it, a wonderful place. Once upon a time it must have been a flourishing, populous, and wealthy city; but there was more than this to be deduced from an attentive study of the buildings, and more particularly of the interiors of the great palaces and temples.

The magnificence of those—faded, falling to ruin, yet always grand and impressive in the story that they told—astonished Wydale, and excited his ever increasing wonder as he made his way about them.

There were exquisitely carved basreliefs, statues, and pillars; and colored frescoes, too, depicting battles, pictures of the sea, with quaint, old world, little ships, and other scenes, all telling of a white race—now apparently vanished—that had peopled the land in former times; a race that must have had their armies, their horsemen and chariots, their war fleets and their trading ships, their battles by land and sea, their triumphs, and their slaves and captives—all this and more was depicted on those walls with wondrous artistic skill, and in colors that were even now distinct and even brilliant.

Though partly prepared by Dareville's description, Wydale was utterly astonished at all he saw; and, so fascinating did he find the study of those surprising relics that the hours slipped by almost unnoticed. Even his young companion was impressed and interested, though he could not altogether grasp the true significance of all he saw.

They sat down in the grateful shade of a group of cedars that stood near the edge of the lake. It had probably once been the fair garden of a stately pile that raised its towers and massive walls close by. There they made a light meal upon the food they had brought with them and then resumed their exploration of the ruins.

They wandered by marble mausoleums and many sculptured tombs that spoke of the mighty dead of a mysterious past, and so on through the palace courtyards and broad terraces with wide flights of steps that extended to the water's edge, till they came to the outskirts, where green fields and groves of fruit bearing trees took the place of the deserted buildings.

Here Owen, looking round, saw at some distance the heights that, presumably, shut off the valley they were in from the sea to the south.

"We had better climb yonder rocks, George," he now said. "From there we should be able to get a view of the line of coast on this side. Do you think it will be too tiring for you? Remember, we shall have to go all the way back."

But the boy protested that he felt quite equal to the exertion, and accordingly the two proceeded in the direction of the heights.

Wydale's thoughts were full of the scenes he had just left, and of all kinds of quaint fancies they had evoked. To most minds such ruins must ever possess a solemn and profound attraction, suggesting thoughts of the past that sadden while they interest.

In the present instance the feeling of melancholy that one can seldom repress when it comes over one was heightened by the strange apparent loneliness and isolation of the whole island itself. They had seen many gruesome

monuments of a forgotten past in the poor, deserted hulks that had lain along their route to the island, but these had seemed almost an appropriate feature in that desolate, silent wilderness of weed.

Here, where smiling, murmuring streams ran from the hillside into the sleeping lake, where the whole landscape spoke of walks, and groves, and gardens that had once been the delight of the few who walked in them and the envy of the many who gazed upon them from afar, where soaring edifices and towering palaces told of wealth, of pomp, of pride, of power—the contrast suggested by its present utterly forsaken condition was at once more startling, more impressive, more awe inspiring.

Occupied by thoughts and feelings such as these, and having no watch to refer to, Wydale noticed neither that the afternoon was fast wearing on nor that a dull haze was creeping over the landscape. The two continued on their way towards the heights, but as the ground began to rise, the journey became steeper and more difficult at almost every step.

Road or path there was none; huge masses of rock that had fallen from above were scattered here and there in wild confusion, necessitating detours, while their direct route would be obstructed at other times by deep gullies or fissures.

While they were thus absorbed in picking their way with no more definite idea than that of reaching the ridge and looking beyond it, the mist crept up to them, and soon shut out from sight every object around them save those almost within reach. And even these at last disappeared. The mist, indeed, soon became so dense it seemed to wrap them round as with a cloak and overhead it hung like a somber, threatening cloud.

And now they found themselves in considerable difficulty. It was alike impossible either to proceed or to return. It was, indeed, dangerous even to move, for at any moment they might be precipitated into one of the fissures that they knew were all around them.

Owen looked about him in some dismay.

"I fear there is nothing to be done but to sit down and wait for this mist to clear," he observed ruefully. "And that may mean passing the whole night here. I was wrong to have ventured so far in face of the gathering fog."

"Well, it isn't cold, Mr. Wydale," George returned philosophically. "And, as there's no one about to interfere with us, we can't hurt much."

"No, but they will be anxious—alarmed on board the brig," reminded Owen.

"But they will understand that we couldn't get back through such a fog as this," the optimist consolingly suggested.

But to proceed was quite impossible, so the two sat down on a ledge of rock to wait with such patience as they could command. They made a little meal upon what they had left, obtained with some difficulty a draft of water from a rivulet they could hear trickling close at hand, and then Wydale filled his pipe and smoked in contemplative silence.

As is often the case with mountain mists, there was light enough to read by, though it seemed dark and gloomy compared with the glare of the sun in the earlier part of the day. So George took out a little book to read. He

had found it—several, in fact—in the seamen's quarters on board the Saucy Fan.

Being chiefly concerned with tales of pirates, sea thieves, and other desperadoes, it naturally had an irresistible attraction for the finder. He had carried the whole batch off to his own cabin, and afterwards had always kept one in his pocket for reading in his spare moments.

How long they remained thus silent neither could afterwards exactly say. Wydale had lost himself in a day dream with which George's sister had probably much to do. George had reached a most exciting point in the story he was reading—when the hero, a boy of thirteen, spits a few burly ruffians on his cutlass at one thrust—when, in the stillness around them, they distinctly heard the sound of voices.

In an instant Wydale was on the alert, and had put a firm grasp on the shoulder of the boy as a warning to be silent. Then they sat still and listened.

Again the voices could be heard, this time a little nearer, but not near enough for them to distinguish what was said. Only one thing was clear to Wydale's mind. There were two or more men close to them in the fog; therefore there must be people on the island after all! At the same moment another idea came into his mind.

Might not these people be foes in search of them? Perhaps, while he and his companion had deemed themselves unseen, some one living farther away might have marked them down, noted the direction they had taken, and might be now furtively following and seeking them with hostile purpose. If so, the sudden mist had, in reality, been a boon, for it had hidden them in friendly fashion from lurking foes.

He signaled George to be absolutely silent, and to get up. Then both rose and stood listening and peering anxiously through the fog.

It was very dark now and very quiet, and for a space they heard not a sound. Then the voices were once more heard, this time a little nearer and somewhat raised. Apparently the speakers were engaged in a dispute.

Suddenly Wydale heard a faint rushing sound as of a wind or strong current of air. It grew rapidly louder, and seemed to be approaching them; and now it could be heard almost close at hand like unto the mighty wings of some unseen monster of the air of a size far beyond any known earthly bird.

Most strange of all, a cold, sickly horror seized upon the two. It was a feeling of nausea, such as might be caused by an aroma of intolerable foulness, and with it the sensation of repulsion and disgust that a human being has for a loathsome, unclean thing.

It was the feeling that might be roused in one who, lying awake and still in the middle of the night, suddenly feels the cold, slimy touch of a snake, of whose size or nature he is ignorant, slowly creeping over or winding round him. And, under the influence of this deadly feeling, both Owen and his young companion found themselves fast held as in a vice.

All power of motion, of speech, almost even of thought, seemed gone from them. They could only wait and listen helplessly for some greater horror which they instinctively divined was yet to come, against which they were powerless even to struggle. And, during a space that seemed like hours, but

was only measured by seconds, the rushing sound came nearer and nearer, and seemed to be almost upon them, when all at once it ceased.

Then there arose on the heavy air a cry, a shriek, so appalling, so full of utter, hopeless agony and horror that it struck to the very hearts of the two listeners, almost like a stab from an actual dagger. Still they had no power to move, and only could stand motionless, and wait and listen.

The cry was not repeated, and for a while all was silent; but presently could be heard low, indistinct sounds, the nature of which Wydale could but dimly guess at. But in his own mind he could only compare them to the rending of flesh by claws or beak, or both.

George turned upon Wydale a face of ghastly whiteness and sank helpless to the rock he had just been seated on, and Wydale, with an effort, roused himself and caught the lad before he fell. He laid him gently down and knelt beside him, too dazed and still too sick and faint to be able to gather his own thoughts, and quite unable to cast off the paralyzing spell that had seized upon his faculties.

And thus the minutes passed. To the two hapless listeners the time seemed an eternity, but it was brought to an end by the lifting of the mist. Slowly at first, but swiftly a little later, it grew thinner, then drifted away before a light breeze that had sprung up.

Then Owen, gazing with straining eyes in the direction from which had come that awful cry, saw dimly a monstrous shape rise itself on wings almost colossal, and sail heavily away on the breeze into the receding mist, as might a gigantic, gorged vulture after one of its loathsome feasts. Then the paralyzing grasp that had laid hold of his very heart strings was relaxed, the blood resumed its normal course, and he was able to think, to act, to rouse himself.

George also, who had lain like one dead, revived, and lifting his head, gazed wonderingly around them. Owen put his finger on his lips, and, drawing from his pocket a small flask of brandy he had brought with him for emergencies, poured a little between his lips, and then took some himself.

The mist had now nearly disappeared, and the setting sun was shining brightly when the two finally got upon their feet. Wydale now saw that the rocks beyond were almost perpendicular.

The only way out from the *cul de sac* in which they were lay in the direction whence they had heard the voices and that blood curdling shriek. Now, however, all seemed still around, and he resolved to leave their rocky labyrinth at once, lest the darkness should prevent them.

Cautiously they moved forward, but had gone only a few steps when, turning the end of a boulder, they came upon a fearful sight. On the ground, right in their path, lay the motionless body of a man. He was on his back, with a great gaping wound in the breast, which looked as though it had been torn open by some ravening beast.

To his astonishment, when he examined him more closely, Owen saw that the body was that of one of the ruffian crew of the Saucy Fan. He could recognize the face, too, though now distorted and set in such a look of ghastly horror as he had never seen before, and earnestly hoped he might never see again.

He would have prevented George from looking at it, but they had to step right over it. Stooping down for a moment to ascertain whether the man was dead, he was attracted by the glitter of something hanging from the trousers' pocket, and he recognized, in another glance, the gold seal on his own watch chain.

He took hold of it and drew out from the man's pocket his watch and chain together. Glad as he was to recover them, he could scarcely repress a shudder when he noticed that there was blood upon the seal. He wiped it clean, and, slipping it into his own pocket without comment, hurried on after the boy, who had passed on without a pause.

Just when Wydale caught him up, a man crept out from behind a boulder a little way ahead of them. His face was white and haggard, and his eyes were bloodshot; but they recognized at once, even in the now waning light, Steve Foster, the brutal mate of the Saucy Fan. Evidently he at first scarcely knew what he was doing, but he pulled himself together, and, raising a hand holding a revolver, he called in a hoarse voice to the two to halt.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A SUPERNATURAL SWINDLE.

BY TUDOR JENKS.

An experience in transcendentalism.—Being the tale of a sentimental ghost, endowed with a keen sense of humor and presumably with a tendency to jump his board bills.

SO long as life glides by with unruffled surface men of any disposition are content, whether they be emperors or scullions. Fussers, rows, adventures or happenings are to me bores insufferable, one and all. If fate had made me a reformer or a conqueror, I would have resigned any claim to a quiet life. But on the front of my house my name precedes the letters D. D. S., and in my back parlor is a chair that is meant to receive the victims of cold and hot drinks, candy, and other substances inimical to enamel and dentine.

Being a dentist, I felt aggrieved when selected to figure in a ghost story. Not that my electric drill ever went upon a career of crime, perforating a patron's brain, or that the gas bag slew its victim. It was not the ghost of a friend or even of an acquaintance. A complete stranger's ghost thrust himself upon me without excuse, and long after office hours.

I was working late, on a difficult plate, when I heard a sepulchral groan from the operating room. I know it was sepulchral, for an ordinary groan is, to men of my profession, a mere incident of the day's work.

I looked toward the room, which was unlighted, and said, "Dear me!" The groan was repeated, and I advanced to the door, peering in. I saw a waving light green figure rocking itself to and fro, just within the fancy glass folding doors. 't must have seen me, for, with the preface of another groan, it said:

"Oh—h! are you a dentist?"

"Yes," I replied; "what is it?"

"Oh—oo—oh!" it replied, advancing toward me; "I am a ghost, and I have a horrible toothache! Oh—h!"

"If this is a joke," I said severely, "it is one I do not relish. Why do you haunt me with your supernatural toothaches? Go haunt the candy maker, or the cook. You're not one of my patients, are you?"

"No—o—oh!" wailed my visitor. "But you were the nearest dentist, and—ouch! This is worse than dying!"

"But you have no power over me," I insisted boldly. "If you come as a ghost, go haunt some one who deserves it. I haven't slain any one. Go find a vivisectionist. If you come as a patient, you're too late. It's long after office hours. Didn't you see my sign?"

"Yes!" declared the green visitant, in a voice of triumph; "I saw your sign, and therefore do I claim dominion—ow!—over you!"

"In what way?" I demanded.

"Come," said the ghost, in a tone so commanding that I followed involuntarily.

Drifting to the front door, which noiselessly opened at its approach, the ghost stationed itself upon the front stoop and pointed meaningly to my sign. Obeying the gesture I read the fatal words:

TEETH EXTRACTED WITHOUT PAIN.

"Well?" I said uneasily.

"Well," said the ghost, "by that bold and shameless falsehood I claim the right to haunt you."

"Ah, I see," was the reply; "you make the usual error. That sign is quite correct. It doesn't mean *all* teeth extracted without pain; it means *some* teeth."

"Is it so?" asked the poor ghost, as it clapped a nebulous hand to its transparent cheek and rocked again; "and what teeth come out painlessly?"

"Milk teeth," I replied.

"Alas!" cried the shadowy thing, "then what shall I do?" and it groaned in pain and despair.

"Come," I said, my professioned pride asserting itself, "you see it is useless to bully me; but though a dentist I am not insensible to human—I mean, inhuman suffering. Float into my operating chair and let us see what is the difficulty."

I followed the green haze as it blew into the room and settled itself upon my cheerful red cushions. I touched the button, and the room was flooded with the electric light. Then, turning to my patient, I saw an empty chair!

"Confound the creature!" I broke out impatiently. "it's gone." But I was relieved to hear another expression of pain, and I added, "So you're here yet, are you?"

"Yes," said the thing, "but I am not visible in the light."

I turned off the current and I saw the filmy presence still in the chair.

"Now, let me see," I said; "open your mouth."

The mouth was opened, much as a smoke ring expands. Then by careful examination I saw that the troublesome tooth was a mere shell.

"Yes, yes," I said; "I see, I see. We'll make it all right in a minute, my dear——"

"Sir—ow!" the ghost interjected.

"My dear sir," I went on, automatically. It was my usual formula for calming my patients while I selected the peculiar forceps indicated—in this case the right premolar.

"Now," I said, arranging the instrument correctly in hand, "let me see which tooth it was——"

As the ghostly jaws parted I gripped for the tooth, but to my surprise the forceps went right through it without meeting any resistance, and at the same moment the ghost closed its smoke-like jaws over the instrument, leaving the forceps inserted in its nebulous head.

For the first time during the interview I was a trifle unnerved.

"This is—extraordinary!" I gasped. "I don't see just how I am to operate on you. I get no grip at all. I can't pull the wraith of a tooth, you know."

"I feared as much," exclaimed the unfortunate shade, with a cloud of foggy tears. "And what—ow!—am I to do? Am I to go on through countless years with this excruciating pain? Even death would be a relief, and it is denied me!"

It was certainly a trying situation, and I set my wits to work to devise a remedy. But the ghost was beforehand with me.

"Eureka!" it exclaimed. "You must ghostify your forceps!"

"Ghostify?" I asked.

"Why, certainly," said the ghost, almost joyfully. "You have a crucible?"

"Yes, several."

"Very good. Put the forceps into the crucible, volatilize it, and then it will belong to my own state of matter."

"We can try, at least," I answered.

So we went into the laboratory, and I deposited the forceps in my largest crucible, arranging a bell glass over it to retain the vapor.

I turned the Bunsen burner on full blast, and before long was gratified to see the forceps lose its luster, its hardness, its shape, and melt. In a few minutes more I saw a metallic mist condensing upon the bell glass.

"Aha!" the ghost cried (it was invisible because of the light), "let me take it out for you. Extinguish the light, please."

I did so, and saw the ghost insert its shadowy hand beneath the glass, and withdraw an equally vague forceps.

"Now," the ghost went on, joyfully, "we have it;" and it preceded me to the operating chair, and was seated before I entered the room.

"Here," said the ghost, extending toward me the ghostified forceps.

I reached out my hand and tried to take it. It had no substance, and my hand closed emptily upon some hot—exceedingly hot—space.

"Ouch!" I said, in my turn. "I can't get any hold on the thing!"

"Blame the luck!" the ghost ejaculated, flinging the instrument aside in anger; whereupon the forceps floated gently away, as the ghost nursed its aching jaw.

"Stay," I ventured, after a moment's reflection; "why don't you pull your own tooth?"

"By the stroke of midnight, so I will!" responded the suffering spirit, heartily.

It wafted itself after the floating tool, grasped it, and returned to the chair.

"How do you work it?" asked the ghost.

"Oh, just anyhow!" I replied, impatiently. "There's no trick about it. Just catch a firm hold, and yank all you know how."

"But won't it hurt?" asked the shade.

"I shouldn't wonder," I said airily; "it often does. But you mustn't mind that. You're the dentist now, and needn't think about the patient."

"That's all very well," said the ghost ruefully, "providing I wasn't the patient, too. I suppose there is no help for it, though."

Then the ghost, with many a wavering twinge, adjusted the sublimated nippers, and pulled with all his vaporous might.

The operation was over in a minute, and was entirely successful. It was not long before the ghost was quite his jolly self again.

He leaned comfortably back in my chair, and was disposed to chat a little.

"If that last plan hadn't succeeded," it said, reflectively, "there were two others I might have tried."

"Indeed?" I asked, with a yawn, for the night was nearly gone.

"Yes; I might have made a ghost of you, for one thing," the ghost remarked, with a purplish gleam of humor in its phosphorescent eyes.

"Could you have done that?" was my question, while the second qualm of that night passed along my backbone.

"Easily," said the ghost. "Oh, it's nothing much. You wouldn't have really minded after it was over. Why, if you'd like to try——"

But I interrupted him.

"What was your second plan?"

"I might have found the ghost of a dentist. Still, that's not so easy. I should have had little to go on, as we know each other mainly by the inscriptions cut in the epitaphs, and there is nothing said about dentists, so far as I have noticed. I might have gone to all the assemblages for miles around—yes, even to the crematories."

"No matter now," I said. "It is nearly morning, and I'd like to get a little sleep. So, if you will kindly pay for the operation——"

"What operation?" asked the green scamp, with an unconscious expression.

"Extracting the tooth," I replied firmly.

"Indeed!" sneered the ghost. "I certainly shall not pay you for work I did myself. What assurance!"

This argument staggered me.

"But," I went on, rallying to the attack. "I gave you skilled advice."

"Yes," sneered the ghost—"Take hold anyhow and yank!—skilled advice, you call it?" and it laughed most hollowly.

"At least," I burst out in anger, "pay me for the forceps you ghostified."

"There might be some justice in that claim," the green swindler admitted; "but even if I allow the claim, I don't see how I am to pay you—'there are no pockets in a shroud,' you know." Again that fog horn laugh.

"You are a common swindler!" I broke out, shaking my fist in his face.

"Strike right through me, if you find it relieves your feelings," said the mocking ghost. "I assure you I shall not mind it in the least. In fact, however, you must admit that I am not a *common* swindler, for ghosts are most uncommon swindlers.

"Still, I do not wish to leave you unrewarded. You have shown me some attention, even if your ulterior object was mercenary. I will in return inform you of a secret that will make your fortune. Listen."

Ascending from the chair the pale mist was borne toward me. I was impressed by the weird intensity of the being's eyes, and listened breathlessly.

"Just beyond the great Washington Bridge, on the Harlem River, is buried——"

But here there came a faint cock crow from the yard of a chicken fancying neighbor, and, with a final shriek of anguish or derision, the ghost vanished.

Next day I removed the inscription relating to the painless extraction of teeth, and I have since been undisturbed.

MOORED.

My soul, a ship at anchor, lies
Land locked within the bay.
Full soon for me yon rose of dawn,
Now in the farthest east withdrawn,
Will burgeon into day!

No more my heart a wanderer,
The sport of passion's waves,
As when my soul ship voyaged free
Upon the fierce, unresting sea
Of love's delights—and graves!

A swelling, snowy gleaming sail
Is showing in the west,
Love's tiny bark of happiness
Whose wings obeying winds caress
Comes bringing dreamful rest.

I wait in peace, from throbbing storms
Of passion far removed.
Love swiftly anchors by my side,
There ever more in calm to ride—
I love and am beloved!

Ralph Alton.

A SOLDIER AND A GENTLEMAN.

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

A tale of stirring adventure in many lands and in which men of four nations play prominent parts—The duel in rowboats on the ocean and what interference on behalf of fair play brought upon the American—More than one case of "out of the frying pan into the fire."

CHAPTER I.—A MYSTERY ON THE SEA.

FIVE lions, three elephants, two leopards, and a murderous African chief, was our score; seventy three days in the wilderness, seven nearly without anything to eat, and two without water, the brief history of our hunting trip into Africa.

Skins and tusks were lying about in profusion, relics of the chase, reminders of days of danger, hardship, and pleasure. Rockstave lolled on a spotted leopard's skin that had been carelessly thrown on the settee, smoking his never absent cigar. I sat with my feet resting on a pile of tusks, my hands clasped behind my head, thinking.

We were in the saloon of my own gallant steam yacht, the *Nomad*, homeward bound from South Africa, where we had left the yacht to penetrate to the Zulu country after big game, and where we had found her on our return, coaled, and ready for another ocean voyage.

I say we were homeward bound. At least this was true of Lord Rockstave, who had been long absent from his estates. It was seldom in my life that I found myself homeward bound. I, like my swift yacht, was a "nomad." "Home," when spoken seriously, to me meant New York. "Homeward bound," when referring to the *Nomad*, meant a return to civilization from a long voyage into strange regions.

This time it meant Paris, where my family was stopping. This family, a very interesting one, consisted of my father, Mr. John Standish, my sister Edna, and my father's second wife, Dona Estella. My stepmother was a very beautiful Spanish woman—but you will hear enough of her later on.

We were all wanderers. This trait was more marked in myself, for I sought strange lands and scenes. The others dawdled in Paris, Madrid, London, New York, or St. Petersburg, as the spirit moved them.

For three years past, the young Earl of Rockstave had been my companion on these voyages of discovery and adventure. Our tastes were largely in common. We were almost the same age. Rockstave was a gallant Englishman, a crack shot, and a good companion.

At the time I speak of we were steaming up the Morocco coast. We had passed the Canaries. Neither of us went on deck to look at them. The sight

was not new to us. A hot wind was blowing off the African coast, and the saloon was cooler and more comfortable than the deck.

"Where are your thoughts wandering now?" asked Rockstave, blowing a cloud of smoke. "Cuba, I'll bet my share of the ivory."

"You lose," I said. "Not in Cuba at all."

"Oh," said my companion laconically. "I did not believe you were capable of forgetting the black eyed señorita even for a moment. I'll stake the largest skin that I saw you look at her picture before you aimed at the big bull elephant we killed last."

"All of which goes to show," I answered, "that you are a person of marvelous powers of observation, but a ridiculously short memory."

"The which can be explained, I suppose?"

"Easily. I was thinking of the señorita. But my thoughts, though they were with Inez, were not in Cuba."

"No—you have me there. I remember now that you told me she was in New York with her parents. Think of it, Standish, old chap! The vast Atlantic rolls between you. Um! Um! If my memory serves me better this time, I believe there is something vastly more insurmountable between you and Miss Duany. A nasty papa, is it?"

"Mine, do you mean?" I replied. "I see you do. Oh, I can manage him. Dona Estella has filled him up to the neck with her antique Spanish ideas about pride of birth, and all that. Well, you are of the nobility. You appreciate her lofty sentiments."

"Can't say I follow—exactly," said Rockstave, shrugging his shoulders. "Has the Dona such lofty sentiments, then?"

"In words," I said. "In mere words, the woman who has the honor to be my stepmother is everything noble and lofty. In acts—well, the old gentleman isn't really a bad sort, except when he is under her influence—which is nearly always now."

"And from what I have seen, and what you have told me, it seems certain that that influence will be against your marriage with the daughter of a ruined planter of Cuba."

"It may be. It will have no effect."

"Would you dare go against the tide?"

"There is no tide. I am as free and independent as you are."

"My dear fellow, I am nothing of the kind. But there is this difference; I have come in to my inheritance. You have yours ahead."

"Scarcely. You are not yet quite familiar with our affairs. Have you been under the impression all this time that I was dependent on my father for—for this yacht, and the money I spend, and all the rest?"

"Not entirely. I knew of course that you inherited a snug sum from your mother. We never went into details. But your father, as head of the family, had, I supposed, the purse strings on the big fortune. It is that way with us."

"Such is not the case with our family. I don't mind telling you the facts. My father was never a very wealthy man, except with the fortune my mother brought him. My mother came of a very wealthy family. She had, when she married my father, something like a million in her own right."

"You are speaking in dollars now—not pounds."

"Dollars. Well, by the death of one aunt or uncle after another, this sum was increased, until, at the time she died, my mother's fortune amounted to something like six million dollars. This was divided under her will into three equal parts. One third went to my father to do with as he pleased. One third went to Edna, and is now held in trust for her by my father.

"My own share, two millions, came at once into my own control, as I was past the legal age. Now you see why the objections of my father or stepmother can have little effect upon my actions in choosing a wife. I love Inez Duany, and I am going to marry her. That's all about it."

Rockstave was silent a few minutes.

"Your sister is a very lucky girl," he said slowly. "And you are a lucky fellow. My own income is not more than half what yours must be."

"I have never speculated. My fortune is safely invested, and my income is about a hundred thousand."

"Standish," said Rockstave, sitting up straight, and looking serious, "have you any objections to me as a brother in law?"

I laughed.

"None in the world, my dear fellow," I answered. "You must know that. Personally, you are the best fellow in the world, and from a worldly point of view all that could be desired. Edna would look well as Countess of Rockstave."

"Look well! She would look well as an empress. Your sister is a beautiful girl, Drake."

"I know that, and I'll tell you something else. She's a queer one. If Edna loves you she'll marry you. If she does not love you, your title won't weigh a grain in the balance."

"No," said Rockstave humbly. "She's too rich to care much."

Now, Rockstave, as I had told him, was one of the best fellows in the world. He had a rent roll of ten thousand pounds a year, a fine old residence called Rockstave Abbey, and was altogether a most desirable fellow to marry your only sister to. He had met Edna, but so far as I knew, no love passages had ever been uttered between them. In fact, Edna, beautiful as she was, seemed too calmly indifferent toward him, and toward all men, to bring out any very warm expressions of love.

Neither of us spoke for a time, and I fell to thinking of what a happy quartet we should be—Rockstave and Edna, and Inez and myself. I knew Inez loved me, and wore my ring on her finger. I liked Rockstave, and had not the slightest doubt that he would succeed in winning Edna.

Musing thus, we sped along, and the chug chug of the engines was the only noise we heard.

Suddenly Rockstave spoke again.

"The reports at the Cape were conflicting," he said, "but it really looked as if there was going to be war between your country and Spain. What do you think of it?"

"It's about time," I said. "I'll go—I know that."

"But Inez—Señorita Duany."

"Great Scott! She would think well of me if I did not enlist to fight the Spaniards, who have ruined her father, destroyed his plantation, and driven them from the island they love."

"I think—I don't know, but what I'll go with you," said Rockstave. "We ought to be able to raise a regiment between us."

"We'll do it," I answered. "When we get to France, we will learn just how the thing stands."

"It will bring about a civil war in your family," said Rockstave. "Dona Estella is intensely Castilian."

"Yes, but that would not worry me. I don't love my stepmother over much."

"No," said Rockstave, with a low laugh, "I suppose not."

I do not know how much longer this conversation would have continued, had there been no interruption. As I was lighting a cigar, one of my men came into the saloon.

"Sir," he said, touching his hat to both Rockstave and me, "Captain Wilkins requests that you come on deck. He sees something, sir."

"I am not surprised at that," I said rising. "We are getting into a region where things are often visible. Come on, Rockstave, and let's see what has interested Wilkins."

We went on deck. We found Wilkins, the sailing master of the *Nomad*, standing with a glass to his eyes and leveled at a yacht which was lying to the west of us.

"What is it, captain?" I asked.

He lowered his glass and turned to me to answer.

"It's only a yacht, sir," he said. "But I can't just make out what they're up to. They've hove to, and are lowering two boats."

Even without a glass, we could see that this was the case. The yacht was a small one, and showed no flag. The two boats on the side toward us had been lowered into the water.

"What's up, I wonder?" said Rockstave. "There's no land nearer than the Canaries. They can't be going to row there from the yacht."

A man brought glasses from the cabin, and we took them.

"Something is going on on the other side now," said Rockstave. "They seem to me to be letting down the boats there."

"That's what they are doing," said Wilkins. "Now, what are they sending four boats into the water for?"

"She can't be sinking, do you think?" I said.

"They would show a signal if she was," said Wilkins. "No, there is no distress on board. There! What the——"

A sailor had dropped into one of the boats and was now working at the stern.

When he had finished his task, whatever it had been, two sailors dropped into the boat. Then followed a man in some kind of military uniform, apparently semi dress. Then another, and seemingly older man. All these took seats in one of the boats. We watched every movement eagerly. The two sailors took up the oars, and pulled one stroke.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Rockstave. "They've got the other boat trailing at the stern."

This proved to be the case. The second boat was pulled to the companion ladder, and a man clad most strangely for a sea venture dropped into it. He wore dark trousers, and a white shirt. There was no coat or waistcoat. A small military cap was on his head—something like a French forage cap.

"I don't understand this!" said Rockstave. "That fellow carries a sword."

This was also true. In the right hand of the lone passenger of the trailing boat there was a gleaming naked blade.

This strange individual sat down in the boat, and the oars of the foremost were dipped. The two boats pulled away from the yacht.

"Look! Look!" cried Wilkins. "There's another."

From around the bow of the yacht now came two more boats, arranged after the same manner, one towing the other. In the foremost sat a group of men easily recognized through the glasses as Spanish officers. In the trailing boat sat a man clad in white shirt and carrying a sword.

"Gentlemen," said Rockstave, "we are now about to witness a dramatic event. This looks to me like a duel."

"A duel it certainly is," said Wilkins. "But the boats, sir."

"Where are they going to fight?" I asked wonderingly. "There is no land in sight."

Rockstave shook his head.

"Mr. Wilkins," I said, "follow the boats. Not too near—we must not run the risk of being called interlopers. But we must watch this thing. Most of those fellows are Spaniards. There may be some trick intended. We'll see fair play, at all events."

"I think you are right about that," said Rockstave, as the captain gave the order to go ahead. "All those in the farther boat are Spaniards, and the duelist in their trailer. In the other boat there seems to be an officer not a Spaniard—French, I take him to be. But that calm fellow following, being towed to the battleground, is—well, what nationality do you make him out to be?"

"I can't even guess his nationality," I answered, taking a good look at him through the glass. "I should say he was a handsome fellow, broad shouldered, and not more than twenty four or five."

"My judgment exactly. Now if he—what! what! *what* are they doing now?"

"They have drawn together," I answered, though Rockstave could see this as well as I. "They have cut the two boats loose."

"By Jove! What a devilish idea!" said the Englishman. "But they can't fight that way. The boats will drift apart."

"Not those boats," I said. "They are lashing them together."

The two boats containing many, now moved away, and we saw that the other boats had been lashed together, bow to bow and stern to stern.

The two men in them stood up and faced each other.

"Mr. Wilkins," I said, "have a boat ready to start any minute. This may be a square deal, and it may not. There are only two men in the crowd not Spaniards. We'll get a little closer and watch."

CHAPTER II.—A STRANGE DUEL.

It was a strange and thrilling scene. In mid ocean—or at least out of sight of land, were two boats—cockle shells that danced on every ripple, lashed together, with no man to row or control them. In each a man standing erect, grasping in his right hand a sword. Near them two other boats containing friends, seconds, sailors, and no doubt a surgeon. The yacht they had left drifted at ease, with a crowd of eager sailors crowding the rail. The Nomad speeding gently through the water, to give us a chance to observe the coming battle, and if necessary, to give a helping hand to the under dog.

We were now near enough to see faces. There was evidently some talk in the larger boats concerning us, for several fingers were pointed in our direction. The combatants stood silently waiting for the end of this discussion.

"Look!" said Rockstave. "Here comes a boat."

One of the boats was now moving toward us. The Nomad did not slacken speed, and it took but a few minutes to reach them. The Nomad's engines stopped.

"What ship is that?" asked a dark bearded man in the boat, as she came under our lee.

"The yacht Nomad, of New York," I answered.

"Americans on board?"

"Yes and English."

We could now see that all in the boat were Spaniards. Yet the fellow who was talking spoke good English.

"What is this going to be?" I asked. "A duel?"

"Shall you interfere?" came the question.

"That depends," I replied. "If it is all square and above board, we will not. Are you all Spaniards?"

"Not all. The men who are waiting to hear from us before beginning their combat are Captain Rafael Arteaga of the Spanish navy, and a Russian. I have the honor to be Captain Rafael's second. I am Lieutenant Juan Crombet. The Russian has a second in the other boat. He is an officer in a French regiment at Algiers."

"What is the fight about?" I asked.

The Spaniard hesitated.

"Pardon me," I called. "It is not my business."

The Nomad had gone past the boat, and, though her speed had slackened, the distance between us was great enough to make shouting necessary.

"What do you say?" came the question from the Spaniard. "Will you keep your hands off?"

"Yes, if the play is fair," I answered.

"What do you mean?" asked the Spaniard, bristling. "We are Spanish officers."

"Small chance for fair play, then," muttered Rockstave at my side.

The Spaniard gave a command. The sailors rowed toward us. The speed of the Nomad lessened. They came up with us.

"We would have postponed this, when we saw you," said the Spaniard, "but, unfortunately, some of us are to go to Cuba at once. The Russian has insulted us, and the fight must go on. The presence of Lieutenant Bergelot of the French army is enough to insure fair play. He is the Russian's second."

"Go ahead and fight," I said. Then to Rockstave I added. "I don't see that it's any of our business. A Russian and a Spaniard. Let them fight it out. We'll be the audience."

Evidently satisfied with my replies, the Spaniards returned to the other boats. Rockstave and I now turned our attention to the principals in the coming duel.

The Spaniard, whom his second had named Captain Arteaga, was a tall, soldierly looking man, and wore a Spanish naval cap. His confronting antagonist was a picture of robust and leonine strength. He was as tall as the Spaniard, broad shouldered, and seemed to have a marvelous control over his emotions. His face, a handsome one, was perfectly calm, while that of the Spaniard expressed malignant hate.

"He's as handsome as a god!" said Rockstave. "What a head! What shoulders! On land I'd bet on the Russian, but this kind of thing is very uncertain. Who knows how the boats are going to act?"

"There's the Frenchman," I said. "What did the Spaniard call him? Bergelot?"

"In an Algerian regiment. We seem to have stumbled upon a strange mixture. But then, the presence of the Frenchman is easily explained. The officers at Algiers often go to Cadiz. That is undoubtedly where that yacht comes from. But the Russian! I wonder who he is."

We broke off talking. At a signal from a Spaniard in the large boat, the swords crossed.

"To the death," said Rockstave. "They did not shake hands."

The clang of the metal reached our ears as the two swords met. It at once became evident that, notwithstanding his strength, the Russian was at a disadvantage. The Spanish combatant was a sailor, and the Russian was not. The motion of the boat was not so likely to disturb the naval officer as the Russian.

Breathlessly we hung over the rail watching the strife. The Spaniard seemed moved by the bitterest hate. The face of the Russian expressed no emotion at all. From the first it was evident that the Spaniard intended to kill his antagonist as soon as possible. The intention of the Russian was not so apparent.

He fought well, but the unsteadiness of the boat became greater. His boat was the one the waves struck up against. This made it more unsteady than that of the Spanish officer. But the Russian was wonderfully steady on his legs. His steel clanged against that of the Spaniard, and the blade sent by hate and a desire to kill did not reach him,

It was a fearful fight, even before any blood was spilled. Our position was such that we could not see all the fine plays. It was a constant change from guard to thrust and thrust to guard. Not a sound came from any one of the onlookers. They were as interested—more so, perhaps, than we were.

I heard Rockstave breathing hard. I had been watching the handsome face of the Russian and the hate distorted one of the Spaniard.

"Standish!" said Rockstave, in a low intense voice. "See the Russian's boat."

"What about it?" I asked.

"It is lower in the water—it seems to me that it has settled. Can you see water in her?"

"There is water in her," I said, looking.

"I thought so. Is it treachery I wonder? Did they scuttle her to sink the Russian?"

"They would not dare," I said, even then doubting if I spoke the truth.

"Ah!" breathed Rockstave. I looked. The right sleeve of the Russian was red. His sword was now in his left hand, and he was fighting as desperately as before. There was a lowering of his brow—a set look about his eyes that had been wanting. He was fighting to kill, now.

The position of the Frenchman was such that he could not see the water in the Russian's boat. He was eagerly watching his principal.

"By Jove! It's the Russian's fight, after all," said Rockstave exultantly. "I'm glad! I know that boat was scuttled."

It indeed seemed the Russian's fight. His powerful left arm had broken down the guard of the Spaniard, and his sword had drawn blood from the officer's shoulder. But the fight went on with undiminished fury.

I glanced at the Spaniards in the boats. They seemed to be laboring under the most violent emotions. They were pantingly watching the duel. They were seeing their friend and companion beaten down by a Russian.

"He'll kill that Spaniard before his boat sinks, and then we can pick him up," said Rockstave.

Almost before the words had died on his lips there was a sharp report and the Russian fell down in his boat. A puff of smoke rested in the heavy air near the boat occupied by the Spanish group.

"My God! Murder!" gasped Rockstave. "The boat, Wilkins, the boat! We must go to him!"

I watched the Frenchman.

"Dastards!" he cried, leaping to his feet in the boat and shaking his fist at the others. "Dastards! Assassins! Is that the way you give a man fair play?"

Another, evidently a Spaniard, in the same boat with him, rose and said something. The Frenchman's fist flashed in his face, and he sat down with a bleeding lip.

"Take me to him! Take me to him!" cried the Frenchman.

The sailors who had done the rowing for him were silent. A sullen look was on every Spanish face. A dastardly deed had been done. What was to be the result?

"The boat!" I said to Wilkins.

In a jiffy Rockstave and I, followed by half a dozen of my men, were in the boat.

"Sir," I said to the Frenchman, as we drew near his boat. "We saw the fiendish act. Will you step into our boat and attend your friend?"

"Thanks, messieurs," he said, stepping into my boat. A few strokes took us along side the boat containing the Russian. At the same time a boat had sped to the Spaniard, and he left the fighting boat. We paid attention first to the wounded Russian.

"The bullet struck here," said Rockstave, touching the bloody forehead. "It did not penetrate. It ploughed a furrow, and glanced off. He is only stunned. It was a dead shot, though. It was meant to kill."

"How about the arm—let's see," I said.

We examined the arm. The Spaniard's sword had gone clean through the fleshy part. A bleeding, but not dangerous wound.

"Get him on board," I said. "We do not need a Spanish surgeon for this."

We lifted him into our boat.

"To the yacht," I ordered.

"Oh, you curs and hounds and pups of the devil!" shouted the Frenchman, shaking his fist at all the Spaniards. "You call yourselves men! Cowards and murderers! Go to Cuba! Kill the women and babies there—it's all you are good for. Go join the army of cowards and butchers. If I knew who fired that shot there would be one who would not go to Cuba."

The faces of the Spaniards were black with rage. This was not a pleasant thing—to have the story of their devilish perfidy go out to the world. Had the Russian died, and had the Nomad not come up at that most unpropitious time, the Frenchman could have been silenced easily enough. But with a crew of American sailors as witnesses, the Spaniards were in a black situation.

"Something ought to be done," said Rockstave. "It won't do to let a lot of murderers go free."

"What would you do?" asked the Frenchman.

"Something, at least."

"The thing must be kept quiet. I beseech you, messieurs, not to say a word about this. It will work untold harm to my friend. May I trust in your discretion, messieurs?"

Rockstave looked across at the Spaniards. They were sulkily making their way toward their yacht.

"Do you see that fellow with the white kerchief around his neck?" he asked.

"I see him—Crombet."

"He was the Spaniard's second?"

"Yes."

"He fired the pistol."

"Are you certain of that, Rockstave?" I asked. "I did not see the act."

"I could swear to it," said Rockstave. "I saw his hand rise and fall. The puff of smoke was nearest him."

"Have I your permission, messieurs, to speak of this?" asked the Frenchman.

"Yes," I said. I was boiling with indignation. It had been such a cowardly thing that I felt as much hatred now toward the crowd of Spaniards as either of my companions in the boat.

I gave an order. The sailors quickened their strokes. The Frenchman called to the Spaniards. They stopped rowing to hear what he wanted to say.

"Courageous Dons," he shouted with a voice trembled with anger, "I charge Lieutenant Crombet with attempting to murder my friend, Boris Godtchorkna. Attend, messieurs, until we take one victim of your treachery on board the American yacht. I will then offer you another. There must be another duel."

There was some discussion among the Spanish.

"I will be your second," said Rockstave.

"Your name, please, monsieur?" he asked.

"The Earl of Rockstave," I answered quickly.

The Frenchman bowed, and was about to say something more to the Spaniards. But Rockstave pressed him back into his seat and stood upright himself.

"I charge you all with being cowards and sneaks," he said. "I present my card—Rockstave, of England—and accept the position of Lieutenant Bergelot's second. Have the goodness to wait till we have attended to the needs of the victim of your cowardly treachery."

The boat had reached the Nomad. Tender, though strong, rude hands grasped the unconscious Russian, and he was lifted on deck.

"Get him to bed at once—in my own stateroom," I ordered. "Steward, see that a supply of warm water, a soft sponge, and some bandages are furnished. Bring also some cognac. I don't think his wound is serious, do you, Rockstave?"

"I do not think so," said the Englishman. "The wound is not deep. He is stunned."

For a short time we forgot the Spaniards. We got the Russian to bed, and bathed his wounds with water. We bandaged his arm and head, poured cognac down him, and had the pleasure of seeing his eyes open.

"Godtchorkna, do you know me?" asked the Frenchman. "Boris! Speak!"

The deep eyes of the Russian looked calmly up at the Frenchman.

"I know you, Bergelot," he said. "But these—what has happened?"

"Happened? The Spanish curs shot you; that's all that has happened," said Bergelot. "But the happenings are not over yet."

I gave the Russian another drink of cognac. He thanked me.

"Never mind what happened," I said. "Go to sleep if you can, and rest. You are in the hands of friends. You are on an American yacht."

"Ah! American!" he murmured. Then he closed his eyes in contentment and dozed off.

Rockstave had been standing in silent contemplation of the Russian's smooth and handsome face.

"What did you call him?" he asked of the Frenchman. "I think I've seen his face before."

I fancied I detected a startled look on the face of Lieutenant Bergelot. He glanced quickly toward Rockstave.

"His name—is Boris Godtchorkna," he said.

"I don't know him," said Rockstave. "Is he in the army—an officer of the Czar?"

The Frenchman smiled—a peculiar, fleeting, inexplicable smile.

"Yes, monsieur," he said. "He is an officer of the Czar and a gentleman."

CHAPTER III.—ON BOARD THE SPANISH YACHT.

WE left the Russian, who was a "gentleman and an officer of the Czar," in the care of the steward of the *Nomad*, and went on deck. In the short time that had elapsed since the dastardly act Rockstave and I had witnessed, something like cooler judgment had taken the place of the hot blooded desire to slay all the Spaniards in sight. My indignation at the act was no less, but I realized that there were certain elements to be taken into consideration before I became known to the world as a slayer of Spaniards in a Russian's quarrel.

When we reached the deck the Spanish yacht lay nearly where she had been when we climbed on board the *Nomad* with the Russian. There were no signs of activity on board. They were evidently waiting for us.

"Now, then, my friend," I said, addressing the Frenchman, who boiled over with frothy wrath as soon as he again beheld his enemies. "Having restored your Russian friend to consciousness and dressed his wounds, which we were bound by the merest demands of humanity to do, let us understand this thing a little more fully before we plunge ourselves into a strife that may cover us with discredit. I assume now to speak for Lord Rockstave, as well as myself. And there is little time to lose, for the Spaniards are no doubt awaiting us with feverish impatience.

"It needs no assurance from us to acquaint you with our indignation at the act of treachery which so nearly cost your friend his life. So cruel and dastardly a thing in a duel I never saw or heard of before. It demands punishment. As an English gentleman, and an American, we are not disposed to allow the thing to go unnoticed. But the question is, how far can we go without becoming involved in a scrape that may compromise our honor? We have your word for it that the Russian is a gentleman and an officer of the Czar. As you are yourself an officer of France, we ask no further proof. But this quarrel between the Russian and the Spaniard—it is at least a bitter one. Now, it must be clear to you that before we go into the affair, some sort of explanation is due us."

The Frenchman flashed a look of hatred toward the Spaniards and then turned in fury on me.

"You are cold blooded, monsieur! Ah, you are an American. You are accustomed to weigh these things. And you, monsieur le Englishman. You, too, are of the cold Anglo Saxon blood. You are not cowards, messieurs.

No, no! I do not think it. I owe you a debt of gratitude even now, for did you not come to the rescue of my friend, Godtchorkna. But it was on the impulse of the moment, messieurs, and now you regret that you have taken up the quarrel of a Russian."

"You are slightly mistaken, lieutenant," said Lord Rockstave. "Standish does not mean to convey the impression that we regret anything. Nor do we wish it understood that we have taken up any one's quarrel. We could not take up a quarrel the cause of which is wholly unknown to us.

"I have offered to become your second in the affair with the man who shot the Russian. That offer stands. But the thing may go farther than one duel. We may both become involved as principals. It is therefore imperative that we know something of the true state of affairs. Also, you should so far confide in us as to tell us more than you have concerning the Russian."

The Frenchman bowed low. There was a tinge of irony in his voice and manner as he said:

"Very good, messieurs. May I ask that you put me on board yonder Spanish yacht? I will release you from all participation on my behalf, and on behalf of my friend."

"Come, come, Bergelot," said Lord Rockstave. "Don't be a fool. You have seen enough of us to know that we will see fair play. But why so much mystery about the thing? You cannot expect two gentlemen to rush into a brawl without knowing the right or wrong of it."

"True, monsieur, I cannot," said the Frenchman. "Therefore, I ask that you send a boat to place me on board the yacht. I shall kill the man who fired that shot. After that, if the Spaniards are all so treacherous as he, they may kill me. The demands you have made are unfortunately beyond my power of compliance. I am as ignorant—I assure you of this fact—I am as ignorant of the cause of this quarrel as you are. If I knew it, I would gladly tell you. All I know is this. I arrived in Cadiz this morning from Algiers, and was surprised by a visit from my friend Godtchorkna whom I had supposed was—in another part of the world.

"He had been challenged, or had challenged, that Spanish captain. I became his second, asking for no further explanation. It was a peculiar duel, inasmuch as neither seemed to be more the aggressor than the other. Both were bent on fighting at once. Godtchorkna is one who fights anywhere and under all circumstances. He will generally be found on the right side. As you know, dueling is prohibited in most of the civilized countries now. The spot chosen was at sea, because there seemed to be less fear of discovery. The Spaniards must have known something of Godtchorkna's strength, for they proposed the boats as a means of rendering equality between the two."

"Did you know that the Russian's boat was scuttled? That had he fought four minutes longer it would have sunk under him?" asked Lord Rockstave.

"Mon Dieu!" shouted the Frenchman. "I did not know that! I am in a garrison, messieurs, and know little of boats. And you, two men who knew, can ask for more information when two acts of murderous treachery are clear to you? Ah! messieurs, you have not the hot blood like the French."

"We may be somewhat more cautious," said Rockstave. "But we are losing time. The Spaniards will not wait. You will tell us nothing, then?"

"Messieurs, before God I tell you the truth. Godtchorkna is what I have said. More I cannot tell you, because the secret is in my keeping, and I have sworn on my honor to tell no one. Believe me, it is a matter involving the life and liberty of my friend. Messieurs, you have traveled much. You know what Russia is."

"I think we are wasting time," said Rockstave. "After all, we are not fighting the Russian's battle for him. We need not mention the quarrel. As the witnesses of a cowardly and murderous act, we are bound to back up Lieutenant Bergelot in demanding satisfaction. Let's get over, Drake."

I ordered the boat ready. A half dozen stalwart sailors took their places in her.

"Come," I said. "We can continue our conversation on the way."

The Frenchman was growing more excited each moment. He could not calm himself for further talk, so we let him alone.

"One of us must take the management," I said to Rockstave. "Shall it be you, as the second of this officer?"

"Scarcely, I think," said Rockstave. "You, as the owner of the yacht, are responsible for the acts of your guests on board. Then introduce me as Bergelot's second, and I will do the rest. You might ask, however, if the man called Crombet will appoint a second. It will save some confusion."

Even when we reached the Spanish yacht, the Frenchman had not spoken, and seemed in doubt whether we were intending to accompany him on deck or not. However, the Spaniards received us, and Rockstave was the first on deck.

"Señors," I said, when I reached the deck, walking to the group of dark featured men that stood not far away. "Will you have the kindness to indicate the owner of this yacht?"

A black bearded man of about forty years of age stepped from the group. He was a tall, handsome man, but his face was distinctly sinister in its expression, and showed signs of great dissipation.

"Permit me to introduce myself, señor," he said in excellent English. "I am the Marquis de Villegas. This yacht is mine. And you?"

"I am Drake Standish of New York," I answered. "This is my friend, Lord Rockstave of England. As you are well aware, we witnessed the cowardly act by which one of your guests sought to end a duel that was not reaching a conclusion satisfactory to him. While Lord Rockstave and myself know nothing about the Russian, we are bound to pay some attention to the dishonorable act which has been committed.

"It might be possible to ascribe the treachery to one person, if the pistol shot was all. But the no less traitorous act, of scuttling a boat to disable the combatants, proves that you, as owner of this yacht, had a hand in the meanness, and the strange form of fighting in open boats was chosen for no other purpose than to render the opponent of your guest unable to withstand him. I introduce you again to the Earl of Rockstave, who will act for Lieutenant Bergelot. Have the kindness to indicate the representative of the assassin."

Now this speech of mine had a remarkable effect on the Marquis de Villegas, owner of the yacht. When I mentioned my own name, a look of surprise showed in his face. As I continued, he seemed to become sad that so cruel a thing had been done, and shook his head as if he would have me understand that he would countenance no such act. But when I accused him of contributing to the conspiracy against the life of the Russian, he seemed stung at once into a most violent fury.

While I was speaking Bergelot shook his fist in the faces of the assembled Spaniards, and muttered untold curses and insults. The impetuosity of the French nature could not be restrained, and I verily believe that had it not been for the heavy hand of Rockstave on his shoulder the fiery Frenchman would have sailed into the crowd with a drawn sword.

With an apparent effort the marquis calmed himself and took my hand in his.

"Before this goes any farther, I wish to have a few words with you alone," he said. Then to Rockstave, ignoring the Frenchman, "Pardon, señor. I will not be long."

The marquis led me to a part of the deck that was comparatively deserted and placed two chairs.

"Sit down, Señor Standish," he said. "Will you honor me by accepting a cigar?"

I remembered his surprise at hearing my name, and his rage at my accusation concerning the boat, and made the excuse that I did not feel like smoking just then. This was true enough. He replaced the cigar, bowed gravely, and then said:

"Señor, it is unnecessary for me to pretend to you that this matter is not one of grave importance. The facts in the case, of which you acknowledge yourself ignorant, are these: That Russian, whose name is supposed to be Godtchorkna, is something other than what he seems. Just what or who he is, I have not the slightest knowledge. But I received word from my cousin, the Count de Palma, who is in Paris, to watch for him in Madrid, and to put a stop to any suspicious actions he might begin.

"I found the fellow in Cadiz. I need not say to you, señor, that I was surprised to find so handsome a fellow a scoundrel. Listen. My friend, Captain Arteaga, has a brother high in the diplomatic service of the nation. Just now, while matters are strained between your country and mine, you will appreciate how necessary it is to keep his name free from all blemish.

"Well, this brother of the captain's, whose name is Carlos—perhaps you have heard of Don Carlos Arteaga—is married to a beautiful French woman. Now this Russian, Godtchorkna, was detected—how shall I make it clear without offending your ears, señor? He was detected—effecting a meeting with her—in her room—last night at midnight.

"Think of the scandal, señor! Well, Don Carlos could not challenge, of course. The necessities of the times restrained him. But Captain Rafael, his brother, had the manhood to take it up, and the duel you saw today was the result. Now, as to the place of fighting. It was partly by the Russian's own wish. As the challenged party, he had the choice of weapons and place.

He had no second. No representative of any kind—at first. He did all his own business.

"He claimed that he desired the combat to take place at sea, where, if he fell, he could be sent overboard and heard of no more. Yet he would not fight on the yacht, claiming fear of treachery. Late in the affair that blustering Frenchman came in, and became the Russian's second. You know the rest. As for the boat the Russian stood up in, I swear to you that I did not know it was less sound than the other. As for the pistol affair, I disavow all interest in it. Lieutenant Crombet was a friend of mine up to the time he fired that shot. He is my friend no longer. What is your wish, señor? You believe me?"

"I am compelled to believe you, marquis," I said. "But this matter must not drop. It cannot be allowed to go unnoticed now. In the interest of fair play this Crombet must be punished."

"Ah! Let him be," said the marquis. "But you! You are the one with whom I wish to have no quarrel. Believe me; there is every reason why we should not quarrel. I am your friend."

"I thank you, marquis," I said, not very warmly. "If you disavow all participation in this matter, there can be no quarrel between us. In fact, there is no quarrel of mine to be settled. I think we should return to the others."

"You will take my hand in friendship, señor?"

"When this matter is settled. I still have some doubts, marquis, about that boat."

A look of the most devilish malevolence shot into the Spaniard's face, then disappeared. It lived long enough, however, to assure me that instead of a friend, I had in him a most treacherous enemy. And as I had never seen or heard of the fellow before, naturally I was surprised.

CHAPTER IV.—THREATENING SIGNS.

WE returned with some stiffness to the waiting group.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "Have you then been settling the international affairs of Europe and America?"

"Not at all," I answered, smiling calmly. "Señor de Villegas and I were simply discovering ourselves to each other. Marquis, will you kindly designate the representative of Lieutenant Crombet?"

"I will take that duty upon myself," said the marquis, bowing. "This might have been averted, señor. But with your American obstinacy, you have thrown down the gauntlet. We are enemies, Señor Standish, and I had hoped to be your friend. Señor, this way, if you will?"

This was to Rockstave. The English nobleman followed the marquis to the same spot he and I had just quitted. They sat down—the marquis with a sort of impatient irritability, which he was striving to control, and Rockstave with the same imperturbability he would have shown lighting a cigar in the saloon of the Nomad.

"This is Anglo Saxon with a vengeance," grumbled Bergelot. "Shall we fight this week or next?"

"Oh, I fancy you will get all the fight you want," I answered. "You should keep cool, and not exhaust your energies in vain impatience."

"So! But you are queer ones, you fellows. I wonder if Godtchorkna was your friend, would *he* be so long in taking up your quarrel. I fancy not."

I left the Frenchman to his own reflections, and began to study the faces around us. They were all Spaniards—save one.

Standing like a statue of stone, in the middle of the deck, with his back toward the wheelhouse, was a most peculiar individual. His features I knew at once to be Moorish. He was not, however, clad in the flowing *burnouse* so common to and characteristic of the Arabic nations. He wore a sort of undress French uniform, and this at once connected him with Bergelot.

"Who is the stony faced Moor?" I asked of the fretting lieutenant.

"Abdullah! Oh, Abdullah is my body servant. A rare infant is Abdullah. Good in his way—but a Moor. You know how far you can trust them."

I gave the impassive face another glance, and wondered if there was really thought or intelligence behind that dark, mysterious mask. My cogitations were interrupted by Bergelot.

"Monsieur," he said, taking me by the arm, and leading me to the rail, where none of the angry and half abashed Spaniards could hear what was said, "pardon me, but I have two very great favors to ask of you. I swear to you first, however, that they do not involve your honor."

"Ask them," I said. "If they are reasonable, I grant them."

"Then one is this," he continued, taking a small package from his pocket. "If I fall, will you be kind enough to deliver that package into the hands of Mademoiselle Victorine Ravary, daughter of Colonel Ravary, at the barracks in Algiers. I ask this of you, rather than of my second, Lord Rockstave, because the yacht is yours, and the trouble to you will be less."

"What shall I say to Mademoiselle Ravary?" I asked.

"It will not be necessary to say much, monsieur. Victorine and I understand each other. You might, however, assure her that I died bravely, with her image in my heart. Ah! Will you do that, monsieur?"

"I certainly will, though I trust the occasion will not arise," I answered. "I think you are more than a match for this Spanish gentleman. Rockstave and I will see to it that there is fair play."

"I am sure you will, monsieur. Thank you. Now the other request is not for myself at all, and is of use whether I fall by the Spaniard's sword or come out unscathed. It concerns the Russian. He is wounded severely, though not dangerously. As you know, he will need attention for a time. I cannot take him to Algiers—for good and sufficient reasons. If I did he would be—pardon, monsieur, my promise to him is sacred.

"I assure you, you will not be compromising yourself at all if you permit my friend to remain your guest till he is recovered of his wounds. I say you will not compromise yourself—I mean because he will strive to prevent his own fate involving you. Godtchorkna is a gentleman. Sound and well he is a match for all his enemies. But if he leaves your yacht in his present condition he will surely fall a prey to those who wish to see him dead. You see what I am asking is considerable, after all, monsieur."

"True—but think not of the danger. If there were no question in my mind about the worthiness of the Russian, he should be made welcome on the Nomad as long as he would remain. But for some reason the marquis has told me that the Russian's sin—that act that provoked this quarrel—was to force an entrance into a lady's room at night."

"A lady's room! He, Godtchorkna! By Heavens, no! But stay! Was it the wife of Don Carlos Arteaga?"

"Yes," I said, thinking that the Frenchman knew of some previous entanglement between the Russian and his countrywoman.

"That accounts for it then!" he said excitedly. "He is on the track then. Oh! I beseech you, monsieur, if I fall, be the friend of Boris Godtchorkna! Allow him to remain on your yacht till he is able to cope with his enemies. Ah, monsieur! I wish I could be at liberty to tell you his story."

"He shall remain as my guest till he is well," I said. "Then perhaps he will trust me sufficiently to tell me himself."

"Ah! Thank you a thousand times!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "A thousand thanks for your generous kindness. I——"

"Hush!" I interrupted. "Here comes Rockstave and the marquis."

The two titled gentlemen, so strangely become the seconds of lieutenants, and one not even of the nation of his principal, came toward us.

"Señors, you will please make room on the deck," said the marquis. "Lord Rockstave insists for his principal that the combat take place at once. I have endeavored by every means in my power to prevent a further shedding of blood. But our friends persist in the ridiculous accusation that we were all concerned in the shooting of that miserable Russian, and will have nothing less than blood as satisfaction. We will proceed, then, señors. We will proceed at once. The duel is to be with swords, and—to the death."

Facing each other, fore and aft, the two combatants stood; the Frenchman calm and vindictive, the Spaniard dark and hateful. All the excited impulsiveness of Lieutenant Bergelot had given way to a steady bearing, which at once raised my hopes for the outcome of this serious affair. Around the two duelists, though not so near as to annoy or hinder them, was the group of stern faced auditors.

The Spaniards were to a man, pale and restless. This was easily accounted for. They were not now witnessing a combat to uphold the honor of Spain, or even of one man. They were looking upon a grave attempt to dignify an act of perfidy by fighting for it. That this act of perfidy had been performed by one of their number, in the sight of an Englishman and American, both of position in the world to give prominence to the story, was some reason for the disturbed condition of their intellects.

With the majority of them neither Rockstave nor I had much to do. Captain Arteaga, who had been wounded in the duel with the Russian, was nowhere to be seen. He had evidently been taken to his stateroom to be cared for. The eyes of the entire Spanish group were on the combatants—save one.

The Marquis de Villegas found time to gaze frequently and furtively at me, in a manner that gave me to understand that there was something of which I was ignorant, which connected in some manner, his fortunes and mine.

I remembered that he had said there was a reason why he and I should not quarrel. I had paid no attention to the remark, but it recurred to me when I saw how his black eyes studied my face.

Within the Spanish crowd Abdullah the Moor stood as impassive as ever. His swarthy face was turned toward the lieutenant. But if his eyes saw the preliminary acts of the coming tragedy, there was no expression on his face to indicate the fact.

Lord Rockstave had somewhat surprised me, well as I thought I knew that nobleman. Having, like all true Englishmen, observed a certain amount of caution at the outset of the affair, he now, like all true Englishmen, had plunged into it with a grim sort of ardor, and was the master spirit. His face was calm, but there was in it some of the steeliness of the British character that stiffens a man in times like this. No man like Bergelot could have had a better second than Rockstave.

As for me, I had by that time become a wholly useless appendage. I was neither second nor principal. I stood idly watching the play of events, thinking that in a few moments it would be all over, and we would be back on the deck of the Nomad. It so happened, however, that while Rockstave was busying himself with the last preliminaries of the duel, and I was leaning against the rail, seemingly an indifferent spectator, I chanced to glance toward the group of Spaniards and saw a movement I did not like.

There had been a look, a whisper—a quick movement of two hands toward pistols. There was fresh treachery in the air. Now, under these circumstances, what, thought I, is best to do? If I speak, and accuse the Spaniards, the thing may upset Bergelot so that his opponent will kill him. I don't want to unnerve him. But something must be done at once. I saw the marquis glance my way. I stepped quickly toward him.

"My friend," I said to him, turning my back on Bergelot and Rockstave, "I have a word to say to you."

"Señor, I listen," he replied with gravity.

"There are signs that indicate that some of your guests need restraint," I said. "I have just seen acts that are suspicious. Pardon me, if, after the treachery I witnessed toward the Russian, I am suspicious of all sly movements. I think two or three of your friends are ready to take a part in this about as unworthy as the part played by Crombet in the other."

"Ah! I answered for my friends, Señor Standish," said the marquis.

"So will I," I answered, with some lack of diplomatic suavity in my tone. "Let me make this fully understood. Lieutenant Bergelot is here as my guest. I am armed. I have on board the Nomad fifty men, all told, about three times as many as you have here.

"The Nomad is well supplied with arms, as we have just made a visit to Africa, hunting big game. I wish to say, that if a shot is fired in treachery to Bergelot, Lord Rockstave or myself, I will have those fifty American jacks over here in a jiffy, and I'll sink this yacht with all on board."

The marquis seemed to gasp. He certainly turned pale. There was a convulsive movement of his fingers. He shot a glance toward his guests, and toward the crowd of sailors—now interested spectators of the scene.

I turned away from him, for the word had been given.

The swords of Bergelot and the Spaniard Crombet clanged and rang. It became at once apparent that the Frenchman was a skilful swordsman. The Spaniard was less able, but had the advantage of size. The Frenchman was calm—murderously calm. The Spaniard strove to be calm also, but his patience was not equal to the cool beginning of the Algerian officer. From the set look on Rockstave's face, one could not tell what he thought. He was watching like a cat for treachery.

• After a few thrusts and parries it became evident that the Frenchman was playing with the Spaniard. The point of the Spanish officer's sword never once pricked the Frenchman's skin. It would seem to drive for his heart, but would shoot off at a tangent, and the clang of steel told how the swords had crossed and met.

I realized that the game was in the hands of the Frenchman. And I knew further that it was a duel to the death. Therefore, the prospect before us was that we would see a dead Spanish officer within a few minutes.

Had I chanced to become a participant in an ordinary duel, I should certainly have striven to prevent a fatal ending. But my indignation had been so thoroughly roused by the cowardly and brutal act of the Spanish lieutenant in the boat, and the evident purpose of some of his comrades to repeat the thing, that I felt no qualm whatever, and seemed reconciled to the fact that the Spaniard would deserve all he got. And at any rate, it was not my business to prevent justice being done by the Frenchman. The Russian was his friend, and I believed it was within the Frenchman's right to punish the aggressor.

Something like my own thoughts must have been moving in the minds of the Spanish audience. They grew restless and ill at ease. Here was an officer, their friend, being slain—there was no doubt of it—slain by a superior swordsman—and they were impotent to intervene. Many glances full of hate were shot at me, for by this time the burden of my communication to the marquis had become known.

It was a panting, dry lipped crowd.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

RHYMES TO A MINIATURE.

DEAR maiden, to this imagery that art hath caught
Full faithfully of that fair face I know so well,
I yield a homage that no mortal tongue may tell
The measure of. Upon my speech there rests the spell
That memory hath placed, fond recollection wrought.

The treasured ribbons fade; time, desecrating, works
Such wanton waste, the painted figure wears away;
But in my heart of hearts thy scepter hath its sway,
There sits enthroned thine image where is no decay
And in the stillness there thy merry laughter lurks.

John Carleton Sherman.

A DASH FOR A THRONE.*

BY ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT.

Author of "By Right of Sword."

Being the recital of the many striking adventures that befell a man who died to one identity and entered upon another wherein he was called upon to assume still a third—How he became entangled in an intrigue whose goal was the throne of a kingdom, and the part he played in the plotting.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

A lieutenant of the Prussian navy, who tells the story, becomes involved in a quarrel with the prince, his future emperor. He finds, that to avoid disgrace by court martial, he must encompass his own death within a week.

Dr. Mein, an old friend, causes the young man to fall ill, and apparently die. A mock funeral takes place and to the world he is dead. He goes on the stage under the name of Heinrich Fischer. Four years later Dr. Mein, having made him his heir, Fischer retires, not however before he has aroused the anger of a certain actress—Clara Weylin, who suspects some mystery in his past and swears to discover it.

While looking for some new career Fischer becomes identified as Herr von Fromberg, nephew of the Prince von Gramberg. As the real owner of that name denies his own identity through purely personal reasons, Fischer determines for the time to play the part.

On being conducted to the castle, he learns that the Prince von Gramberg has just died, making his daughter, Countess Minna, sole heir. Fischer soon finds that she is betrothed to the Count von Nauheim, one of his former enemies, and with this count he soon has a wordy tiff, becoming at the same time close friends with Herr von Krugen and Herr von Steinitz, two gentlemen who had been in closest confidence with the late prince.

Fischer finds that he is in the midst of a political intrigue to overthrow the mad king of Altenwald, and to put in his place the Countess Minna, who, her brother Gustav having been killed in a duel, is the rightful heir. Her future husband, the Count von Nauheim is keenly interested.

Fischer meets the Countess Minna and her aunt, the Baroness Gratz, rashly betraying his enmity to the Count von Nauheim.

He then goes in search of the real Von Fromberg, finds that he has become a Frenchman, changed his name to Henri Frombe and drawn up a declaration renouncing his heirship to the house of Gramberg. This document he gives to Fischer, whereupon the latter, making up his mind definitely upon the rôle which fate has thrust upon him, goes back to the castle as Herr von Fromberg.

Under this name he goes to Braunstadt with Von Nauheim, first, however, telling the Countess Minna that, in case of his not returning, she must flee to Paris. In Braunstadt he learns that Von Nauheim's first wife is still alive, and later, through Juan Praga, the duelist, after saving the latter's life, he finds that Von Nauheim is a traitor, an agent of the Ostenburgs, that there is a plot within a plot by which the mad king is to be deposed and the countess ruined by Von Nauheim, when the throne of Altenwald will perforce go to Duke Marx of Ostenburg. Von Fromberg, making an appointment with Praga, rushes madly away.

CHAPTER IX.—MY PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

THE first effect upon me of Praga's story was to rouse and thrill every pulse of passion in my nature. I could not think connectedly, and as I plunged along through the early morning to Von Nauheim's house, I was *This story began in the December issue of THE ARGOSY. The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.*

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impelled by an overwhelming desire to call that villain instantly to account. Insane plans flitted through my head of dashing into his room and making him fight me to the death; and I gloated in the belief that I could kill him.

But as the air cooled my fever, my steps slackened their speed, my judgment began to reassert its rule, and I saw that I should make a huge mistake if I allowed myself to be led in such a crisis by the mere impulses of blind rage. I had another to think of beside myself.

He was waiting up for me, no doubt curious and anxious to learn what I had been doing; but I dared not trust myself to be with him then; so I sent a message that I was unwell, and hurried at once to my rooms.

Then I made the first practical admission that I felt myself in peril; for I searched the rooms thoroughly, to see that no one was concealed in them, and I looked carefully to the fastenings of the doors to make certain that no one could get in while I slept. I resolved also to buy myself arms on the following day.

I could not sleep, of course. I lay tossing from side to side all through the hours of the dawn, thinking, puzzling, speculating, and scheming; striving my hardest to decide what I ought to do.

After what I had seen in the attack on Praga, I could not doubt that my own personal danger was great. Gustav's fate had shown that the men I had to deal with were infinitely cunning in resource and absolutely desperate in resolve. Where then might I look for any attack?

I judged that it would be most likely to come in some shape that would be difficult to trace to its authors; and I felt that I must guard against getting imbroiled in any quarrel, must go armed, and must be always most vigilant and alert when I found myself in circumstances that would lend themselves to my being attacked with impunity.

I own that I did not like the prospect. I don't think I'm a coward, and claim no greater bravery than other men; but the thought that any moment might find me the mark for an assassin's dagger or bullet tested my courage to the utmost.

My main problem, however, was, of course, as to what I should do in regard to the plot. There were undoubtedly a number of men pledged to support Minna's cause; loyal, true, faithful men of honor who had risked much for her and would uphold her to the last; but how was I to distinguish the false from the true?

If I could do that, my path would be plain enough. I could reveal the whole business to them, and we could together take means to checkmate the inner treachery. But I could not distinguish them; nor on the other hand could Minna in honor desert them.

There was the alternative of flight, of course; I could return to Gramberg and rush the girl across the French frontier; but in addition to the distaste for abandoning those who had been true to her, there were other solid reasons against the flight.

I could not see that there was any permanent safety for Minna that way. As Praga had put it, it was a canon of the Ostenburg position that there should be no Gramberg claimant to the throne left alive or fit to claim the throne;

and I did not doubt for a moment that she might still be the object of attack wherever she went. Their arm would be long enough to reach her. Thus flight would thwart the Ostenburg scheme, but it would not achieve what was far more important to us, the safety of all concerned.

Thus I was driven back again upon my former conclusion that the policy of flight must be only the last resource when other things had failed. And I made up my mind that if at all possible this Ostenburg scheme must be met and outwitted.

After many hours of thought on these lines, I began to see two courses. We must go on with the scheme up to the very verge of its completion. Then Minna should indeed disappear; but the disappearance should be stage managed by us and not by the Ostenburg agents; and a daring thought occurred to me, to entrap these men with their own snare when pledged to the hilt to support Minna.

I would not only let her reappear at the very moment when they would be reckoning on her absence to push the claims of their own man, the Duke Marx; but I would get hold of this duke himself and put him away in her place. We would thus hold the throne against them for long enough to make such terms of compromise as we chose to dictate.

It would be a daredevil piece of work and call for one or two desperate men. But I had two already to hand: Von Krugen and Praga, with Steinitz as a faithful third; and we might find one or two more among those who were faithful to Minna's interests.

The thought of this so roused me that I could not stay in bed, but paced up and down my room in a glow of excitement, as I thought out, pondered and planned the details move by move, to the final climax.

My first step must be, of course, to mislead all those concerned in the scheme to believe that I was with them, and that I pledged Minna herself to the same course; and I went to meet Von Nauheim in the morning with this idea clear in my thoughts.

"You were out of town yesterday, prince," he said.

"Yes, I am accustomed to quietude, and can clear my thoughts best in the country. This affair worries me."

"I understood you were ill when you came back."

"Merely an excuse. I was fatigued, and in no mood for conversation. It was late."

"It was, very," he replied drily.

I made no answer and after a moment he said:

"I presume you were thinking about our matters?"

"They were not out of my thoughts all day, and have kept me awake all night. I could wish I had never heard of them," I exclaimed sharply.

"I suppose it is rather a big thing for you to decide," he said with a laugh; and then added quickly: "I presume you have decided, though. We shall expect to know tonight definitely."

"I am disposed to advise my cousin to join you and go on; but it may be nervousness, or that I am unused to such weighty affairs—whatever it is, I scarcely know how to answer."

"Well, you have had five or ~~six~~ days, you know."

"I've had to change all my views. I came to Braunstadt with the conviction that such a scheme must fail and could only end in disaster or perhaps worse."

"And now?" he asked, eying me sharply.

"I see the risks are enormous; but success seems much more probable than I thought. Indeed, if all is as it appears to be, I don't see where failure can come. I was trying to see that all day yesterday."

"What do you mean, 'if all is as it appears?' What else can it be?"

"In a thousand schemes every one must have a weak spot somewhere. In this I fear what Berlin may do."

This answer relieved the doubt I had purposely raised, and he smiled as though my objection were ridiculous.

"Discuss that with Baron Heckscher. You'll soon see there's no cause for fear in it."

"If I were sure of that, my last objection would be gone."

"Then you are ours at last," he exclaimed triumphantly. "And I'm right glad of it, prince. You'll never repent throwing in your lot with us, for we shall rule this kingdom as surely as you and I are sitting at this table."

Gradually I allowed myself to be led on by him to copy in a modified degree his tone of jubilant enthusiasm, until he had no longer a doubt that I had been won over completely; and I spoke as if in some awe of the magnificent mission and great opportunities which a woman of Minna's high character and aims would have as the future queen of Altenwald. He indulged this vein in the belief that he was drawing out my earnestness and encouraging my loyalty, and indeed, fooling me to the top of my bent.

He asked me how I would spend the day and whether I wished to see any more of our friends before the meeting to discuss my lingering doubts as to interference from Berlin; but I said I would rather be alone as I was accustomed to solitary meditation, and that I was going to ride. He placed his stable at my disposal, and suggested one or two places of interest to which I could go.

I pretended to accept his suggestions, and he watched me ride off, standing bareheaded and gazing after me. When I turned, he waved his hand, and his face wore a smile of confident self congratulation at the cleverness with which he had duped me.

I kept to the road which he had mentioned for a short distance, riding at a slow pace, and then turning off from it I threaded the outskirts of the town until I struck the Linden road, when I put my horse to a sharp canter to keep my appointment.

One point I had to consider carefully—how far to trust Praga. He was a man to beware of, unscrupulous, recklessly daring, and bitterly vengeful; but I had saved his life, and I believed that he had in his disposition that kind of rough and dogged chivalry which would incline him to feel under an obligation to me at least until he had paid the debt in kind.

Assistance of some sort from some one with inside knowledge I must have, for the case was desperate enough; and there was no doubt that he

would be infinitely valuable to me. I had strong inducements to offer, too. Revenge for his own injuries; gratitude for my help on the preceding night; monetary reward to any reasonable amount; and advancement to a post of confidence. There was a risk that he would betray me, of course; but I could not weigh these risks too carefully, and this was one I felt I must be content to take.

I had ridden some ten or eleven miles, and was walking my horse slowly past a small coppice, when I heard him call to me from among the trees. He had chosen a cunning hiding place. He knew his business.

"Ride on to the next turning on this side, prince, and turn in at the first gate."

I followed his instructions and found him already at the gate on foot, having tied his horse to a tree. I fastened mine, and then joined him.

"Were you followed from my house last night?" he asked; and when I told him no, he added: "Good. I had to shake them off this morning. The game is getting warmer. We must not stay long together. What have you to say to me?"

"Will you show me the paper you made Von Nauheim sign?" I asked.

"I will take your word of honor for its safe keeping," he returned, his dark face smiling. "I guessed you would wish to see it," and he handed it to me.

"You trust it to me?" I cried in some surprise.

"I am no fool, prince," he answered. "If you keep that, it means that we shall work together; and that is what I wish. If we are not to do so, you are too honorable a man not to return it. I trust either wholly or not at all." He raised his hands, shoulders, and eyebrows in a combined gesture, as though suggesting there was no more to be said about the matter. "But you; what are you going to do? You have some plan, of course?"

"Will you work with me?" I asked.

"I told you last night—my purse, my sword, and my life are at your service, and if your plan helps my revenge, I will keep as staunch and true as a hound."

"I am going to put my whole scheme in your possession," was my answer; and in the fewest words I told him what I had resolved, keeping back only such parts as touched the Countess Minna and myself personally.

He listened with rapt attention, his swarthy face drawn into thoughtful lines, and he did not interrupt me once. When I had finished, he remained silent a long while, thinking it all over carefully.

"It is a shrewd scheme, prince, very shrewd. There is only one difficulty."

"Well?"

"For you and me to keep alive sufficiently long to carry it through. The attempt last night will not be the last, and the efforts won't be confined to me. They have not touched you so far, probably because they feel it will strengthen their hands with the Countess Minna to get your open adherence to the plot. But when that has once been obtained, you will only be in the way; and you had better lay your account with that. But if we can keep our hearts beating and our throats unslit until the time of crisis comes, we shall win. By the sword of the archangel, but I like the scheme."

"There is a meeting tonight at which I announce my formal adherence, and then I shall return to Gramberg to complete my arrangements."

"If you live to leave the town," he said grimly. "But you understand now the sort of men you are fighting. And what do you wish me to do?"

"Yours will be the most dangerous and in some respects I think the most difficult work of all. The post of honor. You must prepare the means by which the Duke Marx von Ostenburg can be got into our power; and you must be prepared to carry out the seizure the moment I give the signal. It had best be done on the very day of the court ball."

To my surprise, he smiled and declared that that part of the business would not be difficult of accomplishment.

"I may need one man to help me, though I can probably do it all alone; and you will only have to say where you wish him carried."

"I have to find the place yet," I replied. "But how can you do this? Why are you so sure?"

"I can move the female lever which can move him," he returned with his hard smile.

"But at that moment he himself will be all anxiety for these matters of state, and his presence in Braunstadt will be simply imperative for their interests."

"No matter. If he was buried under a mountain and had to claw his way out with his nails and teeth, he would do it at her bidding. Have no fear."

"He will not be harmed."

"That we can settle when we get him," he answered grimly.

I said no more. So long as we could make secure the person of the duke at the moment we needed him, I would see to the rest. Then I arranged how we two were to hold communication, and untethered my horse to leave.

"You will go to that meeting tonight, prince?" he asked.

"Certainly; it is necessary."

"You will go armed, then?"

"Arms will not be of much use; but I shall take them."

"I need not warn you again. But this I would say. At the very moment when you feel safest, expect their attack. And now, as a last word, let me give you a pledge that whatever happens I will not let a word between my teeth. On the honor of a Corsican."

He raised his hat and stood bareheaded. He had the dramatic instinct keenly developed, and he did everything with pose and gesture that might have been taken for artificiality. But I was convinced that he was stanch enough in this affair.

I rode back to Braunstadt by a different route, and my thoughts were busy with the forthcoming meeting. I did not consider it at all likely that any sort of violence would be attempted then; but Praga's words of caution began to run in my head—"When you feel safest, expect the attack."

All the afternoon they were buzzing in my thoughts, and when Von Nauheim returned in time for a very hurried late dinner and the hour of the meeting drew nigh, they were more insistent than ever.

In the afternoon I bought myself arms—a swordstick and a revolver; and

while I was alone I took careful note of the room where the meeting was to be held, its entrances and exits. There was a window in the corner which opened on to a quadrangle at the back of the house, and I resolved to take my seat near that, lest I should need a speedy way of escape.

I had indeed determined upon one somewhat daring step, and I could not foretell what consequences might ensue.

When the hour for the meeting came I took my seat and watched the men as they entered, and sat steadying my nerves and planning my moves in the game which was about to open in such deadly earnest, and which might have such momentous consequences for all concerned.

CHAPTER X.—A COUNCIL OF CONSPIRACY.

My first thought about the meeting was that I had misjudged in an almost ludicrous manner what the proceedings would be. My nerves were no doubt a little overstrung by the events of the past day or two; the dramatic exaggeration which had characterized almost every gesture and action of the Corsican; the actual evidence of my own eyes of the ruthless intensity of purpose with which these people pursued their plans; and my own exceedingly conventional conceptions of what such a plot as this would be, had led me to anticipate some sort of more or less theatrical exhibition of conspiracy at the meeting.

But there was nothing of the kind. The men dropped in one after another just as they might into any small social gathering, chatted with each other, grouped themselves in twos and threes, joked and laughed, discussed the latest scandal, exchanged notes on the newest play, and for a long time talked of nothing but subjects on which they found a common surface interest.

All of them made occasion to come to me and exchange a word or two; how I liked Braunstadt, whether I had been to the opera, if I took any interest in the races, had I heard of the new military order from Berlin, and so on. Nothing more. Yet each contrived to convey that he was very glad to see me present, leaving me to infer anything more.

After a considerable time the man whom Von Nauheim had mentioned to me most often, Baron Heckscher, one of the wealthiest men in Braunstadt, and the strongest leader in the scheme, came across and began to talk to me. He said he took the greatest interest in me; and that it was a matter of great regret I had been so long absent from Braunstadt and Gramberg; and that the honor of the great title I bore was an enormous responsibility for so young a man.

"But I am sure you will prove equal to it, prince. Our conversation during these last few days have convinced me of this. You will play a great part in the kingdom, and, who shall say, perhaps in the empire."

I murmured some conventional reply, and he added:

"There is only one thing against you. You will need wealth. The Gramberg estates should have gone with the title. I cannot understand my old friend's will. But that can be, and of course will be, rectified."

"I am not very ambitious of a state career," I replied, appreciating the proffered bribe.

"The state has need of all her strong men, prince," he answered readily, "and she would be jealous of desertion. She cannot spare you. We old men have had our day, and it is part of our duty and, despite the jealousies of some of us, part of our pleasure too, to mark out the rising men, the men worthy to rise, that is, and see that they have their opportunities. In the time that is coming you will have a magnificent part, for the actualities of power are not on, but around the throne."

In this way he led adroitly round to the subject, and I knew that all his flattery was just so much verbiage. He had had no opportunities of telling whether I was a fool or a genius.

"There is a great deal of doubt about the future," said I sententiously; "but to have earned the good opinion of so shrewd a judge of men as yourself is much." If he could flatter, so could I.

He paused a moment and then in a slightly lower tone and with a suggestion of increased importance, he said, motioning toward Von Nauheim.

"Our friend has told me your very shrewd doubts as to the probable action of those at Berlin. They are very natural, and you are quite right to express them; but—there is no fear on that score. The imperial government is as sick of the vagaries of the king as we Altenwalders ourselves. He is a constant anxiety. You will see why. A madman on a throne is a standing menace to the principle of the divine right on which a monarchy must in reality depend. They will not interfere, because openly they dare not countenance a movement to upset a throne;" and he went on to give me elaborate arguments to explain away my doubts.

I listened very carefully, stated my objections and discussed them all; and then allowed myself to appear to be won round by his persuasion to the view that when once the plot was carried to a successful climax, Berlin would recognize the new position and acquiesce in it. This I myself believed, moreover.

As I held the clue to his real motives, I was greatly interested to note the subtlety with which he avoided the points that were more closely concerned with the duplicity of the inner plot, and dwelt on those where he could be sincere.

"It will depend greatly on the solidarity of the movement and the loyalty to each other of all concerned in it," I said, at the close.

"That is the pith and marrow of it all; and of that there cannot be a doubt. There are some twenty of us here," he exclaimed, with a wave of the hand round the room; "and each of us represents and can speak for at least one strong interest and section. Besides, we are not groping in the dark. I myself have secured assurances from Berlin. We have not a weak link." He stopped and looked at me with an invitation to make my declaration.

I noticed, too, that in some way the fact had communicated itself to the rest of those present that the moment of importance had arrived. They had at first drawn a little away from the table at which we two sat; and I had seen many little quick glances shot in our direction during the discussion between the baron and myself; but there had been no check in the general flow of chatter.

Now, however, there was a decided lull, save where one man was telling

noisily an incident in which he had been the principal, and was laughing at his own joke. The rest were for the most part smoking stolidly with only low murmurs of broken talk.

Von Nauheim was restless and fidgety, champing his cigar with quick, nervous bites, blowing out the smoke rapidly in heavy puffs, and stealing furtive glances at me.

The situation was just as I would have had it. I had effectually concealed the fact that I had entered the room resolved to join them and had produced the impression that at the last moment the baron's arguments had talked away my doubts.

I kept my face impassive and set, as though weighing my words to the last moment.

"We shall go on with you, baron," I said quietly; "but, of course, under conditions."

"How can you make conditions, prince?" he asked, and now the whole room was waiting upon our words.

"There must be a fresh declaration of allegiance to the Countess Minna, as the future queen."

"We are already pledged, every man of us, prince," he returned.

"My uncle's death has altered matters," I answered. "And the declaration will be signed by all concerned, here tonight, and in my presence."

"That is scarcely necessary, as we have signed already. But if you make a point of it, yes."

"I do press it," I said firmly. I had a strong reason which they did not yet see.

I paused a moment before I made my next move, for it was a strong one.

"Again, as my uncle's death is so recent, it will not be seemly—indeed, it is impossible for my cousin's marriage with the Count von Nauheim to take place until after she is on the throne—unless, indeed, all matters are postponed until a sufficient interval has elapsed."

I counted much on this stroke; and that it was a shrewd one was instantly apparent. It was indeed nothing less than a sharp test of the loyalty of every man present, and it started warm discussion among them all, several protests being made.

The avowed object of the marriage was to cement the coöperation of the powerful section of which Baron Heckscher was the head by securing half the Ronal power to their representative; but the secret motive, as I knew, was to render Minna personally unfit to be queen. Thus, to postpone the marriage until after she was actually on the throne seemed on the surface to destroy the very pith of the inner plot, and so to wreck the Ostenburg plans altogether.

Hence, those who were for that interest felt bound to oppose the suggestion, while those who were genuinely for us would admit its reasonableness. To the one side it meant failure and to the other at the worst mere postponement, and my object was thus to detach the latter and see who were really our friends.

To my dismay there were but two in the room, and these the least influential; but I watched them closely, while I stuck doggedly to my point.

It was the Baron Heckscher who came to the rescue.

"I have been waiting to hear the general opinion," he said—he had been sitting wrapped in deep thought; "and I do not see there is any solid objection to the condition. We are all aware that this marriage, like most court nuptials, has been arranged for certain definite purposes;" and he glanced round the room with an effect I did not fail to observe. "And if proper guarantees of those purposes are afforded, I don't see any objection. We are merely gaining the same end by slightly different means. As Count von Nauheim carries certain interests on his shoulders in the marriage, all we have to see is that those interests are protected."

It was most adroitly wrapped up, but I knew too much to be deceived; and as I had now gained my end—the separation of the sheep from the wolves in this assorted pack—I said no more than to agree that any desired guarantees should be given.

"The other condition is perhaps fanciful, as it is certainly personal," I said, "and it is somewhat connected with that which we have just discussed. My cousin, the Countess Minna, cannot, of course, go forward in a hazardous work of this kind, now we are agreed the marriage must be postponed, without a male relative to guide and counsel her. And as we Grambergs have been so unfortunate as to lose two prominent members, there is only myself remaining. One of us, my cousin Gustav, certainly lost his life in this cause—through the treachery of the Ostenburg agents—and therefore we look to you all—I look to you all, gentlemen"—and here I raised my voice slightly—"to secure me against an attack from any source that may threaten my life."

"I know I do not count on you in vain, because you are all loyal to the cause; but there is an additional and very special reason for my thus calling on you. Upon my life and safety the continuance or end of this scheme depends, so far as my cousin Minna is concerned. You may need to redouble your vigilance against our enemies and to strain your efforts to the utmost to anticipate and prevent attacks upon me—but understand quite clearly, that if you suffer me to be attacked and to fall, at that moment my cousin will withdraw from the scheme and openly abandon all claim to the throne."

The disconcerting effect of this short speech was profound.

A dead silence fell on the room for a few moments, and I am bound to confess that I enjoyed immensely the general consternation. It appeared to me the strongest confirmation I could have had of the existence of a plot against my life; and that this move of mine was regarded as a checkmate. But I shut out of my face every expression save one of a kind of friendly expectation of personal assurances of agreement.

"The reason why I paused before replying, prince," said Baron Heckscher presently, "was merely that while I am confident there is not a man in the room, nor among all the thousands for whom we can speak, who would not cheerfully risk his life in defense of one so valuable, indeed so essential to the cause and the country as your own, it is a little difficult for us to pledge ourselves to abandon a cause for which we have made such sacrifices and incurred such tremendous personal risks, should accident intervene to harm you." He was talking to gain time; I could see that easily enough.

"There was no one found ready to defend my cousin Gustav from a man who was no better than an assassin," I said somewhat curtly. "And I have heard that the man is still mixing with some of you."

Von Nauheim's telltale face paled at this thrust.

"Your cousin's rashness was the cause of that quarrel, prince," said the baron, "and it was all against our advice and entreaty that the duel ever took place. As to Praga's connection with the matters since, you know, of course, that in affairs of this kind, we must use such instruments as are at hand. But his connection with the movement is of the most superficial kind."

"My cousin's death remains unavenged," I answered sternly.

"It will not remain so," replied the baron significantly.

"No, indeed," I returned, intentionally misunderstanding him. "For I myself will call the man to account."

"Not until after our plans have been carried through."

"At the first moment I meet with him," said I, with an air of recklessness.

"This must not be," exclaimed the baron quickly. "Do you see what you are doing, prince? You tell us that if you fall the Countess Minna will desert us and abandon the whole movement on the very eve of its success; and yet in the next breath you declare that you are going to court death by fighting a duel with one of the greatest masters of fencing in Europe. Would you wreck the whole scheme?"

"I would avenge my cousin's death," I cried sternly. "Unless, indeed, the Count von Nauheim, as a future member of the family, or some other gentleman here, is loyal enough to us to take up this work."

"I do not fight with hired bravos," growled Von Nauheim.

"There is no man in Bavaria can stand before that Praga's sword," said the baron, while I enjoyed his perplexity.

"Well, then, call him out and shoot him," I exclaimed brutally. "But in all truth, I can't for the life of me understand, since you are all afraid of his sword play, why you allowed Gustav to meet him."

"We had not then had this fearful evidence of his skill; and your cousin denied it, and believed him an impostor," said the baron.

"Nor do I believe in it," I answered vehemently; and I saw that I had produced the impression I wished of extreme caution in some things, coupled with recklessness in others, and had made them believe me thoroughly in earnest in my condition that if my life were taken my cousin Minna would go no farther. I had no wish to press matters any more therefore.

"You are a true Gramberg prince, it is easy to see," said the baron, smiling uneasily. "And I fear you will give us trouble."

I meant to, but not of the kind he anticipated.

"That may be," I replied, ungraciously and curtly. "But now, if you please, as to these conditions."

"We can accept them if you will pledge yourself to take no rash action in hazarding your life until we have succeeded. Otherwise, I, for one, shall withdraw, even now."

I could have laughed aloud at the firm, decisive tone in which he said this—for it was the proof of how I had turned the tables upon them.

I hesitated before replying, as if to think.

"Yes, it is fair that I should give such a pledge," I said then. "I will wait. It will not be long."

"In a fortnight by the grace of God, all will be effected," cried Baron Heckscher fervently. Then rising he said with enthusiasm: "Gentlemen, to our future queen, Queen Minna of Altenwald. May the blessing of God light upon her, and let her bring peace to this distracted state. In the name of God I swear allegiance to the new ruler of Altenwald."

He raised his right hand on high as he took this equivocal and falsely true oath, and every man present followed his example.

It was an impressive scene, and I made haste to improve the occasion.

"We will sign the declaration now," I said quietly.

The baron produced that which had been formerly signed—a short, simply worded document, pledging the signatories to allegiance; and as he appeared loath to allow the paper to pass out of his own hands, he himself copied and then burnt it.

I raised no objection to this proceeding, or to the wording which was sufficiently compromising for the purpose I had in view.

The other men signed it first, and I observed that the baron hung back until the last.

"I am the last to join you, I will sign last," I said quietly, and I laid it before him. He wished to protest, I could see, but there was no valid reason. For the present at any rate I was in the position of power.

He wrote his name slowly, and I thought reluctantly; and when he had finished, he thrust the paper across the small table and held it firmly in one hand, pointing with the other to the place where I should write my name. I saw his object was the same as my own—to get and keep possession of a paper on which the life of every man signing it might depend.

But it was an essential part of my plan that I myself should have possession of the paper to use as I might afterwards find necessary. And I outwitted him.

Not giving a sign of my intention, I took the pen he gave me and glanced at it.

"A pen that will have a history," I said, looking up at him. Then, in making a movement as of preparation to sign, I dropped the pen, and as I stooped and picked it up I broke the nib designedly, exclaiming at my carelessness.

"No matter, there is another pen there," I cried hurriedly, and with a sudden pull I snatched the sheet from his grasp, carried it to another table and signed it before he had recovered from his surprise and vexation. Then I blotted it quickly, folded it and put it away in my pocket, as though this were the most natural and ordinary thing to do.

But I saw the men look from one to the other with half hidden apprehension in their glances.

I knew it was a crisis, and I carried it through with a dash.

"As head of my house and the only blood relative of our future queen, I shall guard with religious care this declaration of your allegiance and fidel-

ity, this charter of the new Altenwald freedom," I said, raising my voice and speaking with as much dignity as I could assume. "In my cousin's name I thank you for your help, and I promise you the most earnest, most cordial, and most generous recognition of your efforts. From this moment her life belongs to her country. For myself, I assure you that although I am the last to join you, no man shall be found more active, resolute, and vigilant in the cause. God bless Queen Minna of Altenwald!"

They echoed the words, but there was little heartiness in the tone, except from the two men whom I knew to be loyal; and I stood on my guard, half expecting some kind of an attack.

But the moment passed and nothing was said or done to thwart me; and after a few words of lying congratulation upon the evening's work from the baron, the meeting broke up.

As the men left I could tell that my acts had produced a great impression on them, and that I had at least convinced them that I was not a man with whom they could safely trifle.

But my task had only begun.

CHAPTER XI.—"EVEN ONE SUBJECT MAY MAKE A KINGDOM."

WHEN the last of the men had left, and I had seen Von Nauheim go out with the old baron in close consultation, I sat on alone for a time, thinking with some exultation of the result of my week's work in Braunstadt, and of the vastly changed position which my shuffling of the cards had created.

I should certainly sleep the sounder for the value I had contrived to put on my life in their eyes; for I calculated that until they had had time to reconstruct their plans, they would not venture to attack me.

What would they do? I pondered the question very carefully, turning it over and over in my thoughts as I knew that wily old baron was doing at the self same moment; unless he had already made a plan and had taken Von Nauheim out to impart it to him.

One thing soon made itself quite clear. Whatever form their next move might take, it would closely concern Minna. She was the pivot on which everything turned in their inner plot. So long as she was a free agent and able to do what I had said—openly renounce the scheme and publicly abandon her claim to the throne—they would not touch me. But the instant they could get her into their control, my power would be broken. I should no longer be necessary to them. I could guess what would follow.

I determined, therefore, to take the initiative and force the game with Von Nauheim; and fortunately he gave me an opportunity.

After I had been alone about an hour he returned and did not take any trouble to hide the fact that he was in a very bad temper. When the surface was scratched, he was too much of a cad to remember that he was my host. He swaggered into the room and poured himself out a stiff glass of brandy and drank it. Then he turned to me.

"I suppose you think you've managed things devilish well to try and play the master in this way."

"Well, I haven't done badly," I said, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"I should like to know what you mean with your condition about my marriage—cursed interference, I call it."

"My meaning was plain enough to the rest; surely I need not repeat it."

"Oh, I know what you mean. But what the devil is it to you? Is it your game to try and stop this marriage altogether? You won't, you know, so you needn't try."

"I would rather discuss family affairs with you when you're"—I was going to say "sober," but checked myself and changed it to—"when you are less excited."

"What do you mean by that?" he cried, taking fire and speaking furiously. "Do you mean to insinuate that I'm drunk?" and he rose and came up close to me.

At that I guessed his motive by a kind of intuition. He meant to put a quarrel on me over this postponement of the marriage; and probably to let it develop into a scuffle, in which he would try to regain possession of the paper I had put in my pocket.

"I prefer not to continue the conversation now," I said coolly.

"But you'll have to, whether you wish it or not. I'm not going to let you ride roughshod over me, I can tell you. You'll just have the goodness to apologize to me for your insinuation that I'm drunk. D'ye hear?"

"I have not the least intention of apologizing to you for anything," said I sharply.

"Oh, won't you? We'll see about that," he cried in an even louder voice; and then by deliberate intention I saw him knock over a small table on which a number of bottles and glasses stood.

These fell to the ground with a loud clatter and crash, and the next moment a couple of servants came running into the room. I judged that it was a preconcerted signal, for the moment they appeared he put his hand on my arm and staring threateningly into my face swore at me.

"You shall not leave the room till you've apologized," he said, calling the two men to his side.

I kept cool enough. I had no difficulty in shaking off his hand, and I stared him full in the face with so stern a look that, bully as he was, he flinched and wavered, and changed color.

"Are you mad, Count von Nauheim, that you would make me forget I am under your roof?"

"No; I'm not mad nor drunk either; but you shall repent this night's work. Here," he called to the men again.

What he meant to do, I know not, for my next action produced so wholly unexpected a result that he had no chance to do anything.

I whipped out the revolver I had in my pocket and leveled it point blank in the lackies' faces, and bade them in ringing tones to be off out of the room. They stayed for no second command, but turned on their heels and scampered for their lives, leaving their master looking very much of a fool in the middle of the room.

I put the revolver away again then, and turned to him.

"Now, that we are alone once more, what do you mean to do?"

But his courage had fled as fast as his servants, and with a feeble attempt at a lying laugh, he mumbled out something to the effect that he had meant no more than a joke, and turned away to hide his confusion in another full dose of brandy.

I saw my chance and took it.

"I do not allow people to play jokes of that kind upon me, Count von Nauheim," I said as sternly as I could. "I prefer to trust the evidence of my own wits, and say that you were in earnest in the attempt to use some violence toward me. Under these circumstances I cannot, of course, remain another hour in your house; and you will understand this to mean that I cannot receive you at Gramberg. You will therefore spare me the unpleasantness of telling my servants to refuse you admittance by not attempting to come there."

"Do you mean that you will try to keep me from my affianced wife?"

"Unless my cousin chooses to meet you elsewhere than at Gramberg that is precisely what will happen," I answered.

"I suppose you want the fortune for yourself," he sneered.

"You have a short memory, count. You have forgotten you told me the fortune would come to me as soon as this matter was successfully accomplished." He flushed; for he had evidently forgotten that part of his former instructions, and my reminder irritated him.

"Then maybe you want Minna and have a fancy yourself to sit on the throne."

"I have nothing further to say to you," I answered stiffly. "Any communication I have to make regarding matters here shall be made to Baron Heckscher." And with that I left the room and the house.

I was glad of the quarrel for many reasons. We should be rid of the man's presence at Gramberg while making our preparations there; and I should feel much freer in any future visits to Braunstadt. But most welcome of all was the fact that I knew Minna would be delighted at my having secured that she should not see him again.

I went to a hotel, passed a very comfortable night after a very full day, and the next morning, before setting out for Gramberg, I paid a visit to each of the two men whom I had ascertained to be loyal to Minna. Their names were Kummell and Beilager; and I urged them for reasons which I would explain, to pay a secret visit to Gramberg.

Then I returned to the castle, lighter in heart and even busier in thought than I had set out. Busy as I was with the details of my own scheme, however, I found more than once my thoughts running ahead of me to the castle, in pleased speculation as to how Minna would meet me, and what she would say to my news.

When I had finished my train journey and was driving to the castle, I could not help comparing my present feelings with those on my first arrival at the palace. I had played the part of the prince so completely during the exciting experiences of the two weeks that had passed since my arrival; every one had accepted my impersonation so unconditionally; and I had

acted and spoken so entirely as if I were indeed the head of that great house, that I had actually begun to feel that I was in reality the prince. I looked upon the signs of deference, the honors, the ready compliance with my wishes, the submission to my orders, as though they were my just due; and I was conscious of a greatly increased sense of dignity which I have no doubt imparted itself to my mien and speech.

I had now no thought of drawing back, of course, until at least I had cut the knot of Minna's difficulties; and I had begun to entertain some very unpleasant and disquieting doubts and anxieties as to how I should shake off my borrowed plumes and return to the humdrum, meaningless, empty, incognito existence.

As to that indeed, a new set of thoughts had begun to take shape in my mind; wild and forlorn hopes in truth, but none the less cherished. The idea was to try to so carry through this business of the Braunstadt plot as to ingratiate myself sufficiently into the favor of the great ones at Berlin as to win back my own position and inheritance.

The most spurring motive that can move a man was developing in me; and developing fast. As a supposititious Prince von Gramberg, I was absolutely impossible as a suitor for Minna's hand. Even if I could save her from this terrible entanglement and escape any recognition, I could not marry her. My life would then have to be lived over a mine which might be exploded under my feet at any moment, to the ruin of both her life and my own.

As an English adventurer and ex play actor my case was just as hopeless.

But as Count von Rudloff there would be no such bar of family between us; my family was indeed as old as any in the kingdom; and I set my wits to work zealously to find means by which I could use this plot to that end. But the odds against me were enough to make any one despair, and the knowledge almost appalled me.

I was not long left in doubt as to the manner of my reception at Gramberg. My cousin was waiting for me on the very threshold, and she came to meet me, her face aglow with pleasure, and her eyes beaming with the warmest of welcomes.

She took my hand in both hers, and for the moment could do no more than murmur words of welcome and gladness at my return. As for me, the sweetness of her beauty, the touch of her hands in mine, and the sheer delight I felt in her presence held me tongue tied.

Then her words burst out with a rush, and she plied me with question upon question about my news, my doings in Braunstadt, what was to happen, and a thousand other things, until I caught Von Krugen's dark eyes—he had met me at the station, and was standing by me now—fixed upon her in shrewd speculation.

"I could not hold back my impatience a minute longer, Cousin Hans," she said at length with a smile. "Although my good Aunt Gratz would have had me wait up stairs in my rooms until you would find it convenient to see me. You will forgive me for this unceremonious assault?"

I would have loved to tell her what I really thought about it; but I put a

curb on any such madness by reflecting that her anxiety had nothing in it personal to myself, so I answered: "I can scarcely tell it you here."

A look of regret and surprise dashed her face for the moment, and she withdrew her hands from mine and bit her lips.

"I have done wrong in rushing to you thus. You will think it unseemly. Will you let me know how soon you can come to me? Do believe, cousin, I would not wittingly do anything to displease you."

I stood silent like a dumb fool; and then, after a pause, she added:

"I ought to have reflected you would have many things to do and that I—that I should be in the way. I will go."

"No, don't go," I blurted out, and then could say no more.

She looked at me in justifiable astonishment, and wrinkled her brows in perplexity.

"The prince was saying as we drove here, that he must see you at once, countess," interposed Von Krugen, and I could have blessed him for the words. Then he went forward and threw open the door of the room near, and looked round, as if inviting us to enter. It was the library.

I shook myself together with an effort and gathered my scattered wits.

"Can you spare me an interview at once?" I asked Minna.

"Cousin!" and her astonishment deepened and found expression in her tone. "Am I not here for that very purpose—and dying to learn the news? Come;" and she went into the room and led the way to the far end, as it chanced to the very window from the embrasure of which I had first seen her.

"I hope your first news is that all this plot is at an end, and that the project of the marriage is dead with it?" I had mastered my stupid embarrassment by this time, and had found my tongue again.

"You must listen carefully to all I have to tell you, and then to what I propose to do," I replied, and plunged at once into as plain a recital as I could give of all that part of the proceedings which I deemed it necessary to tell her. I dwelt upon the reasons why, in my opinion, it was impossible to draw back yet, and upon all I expected to gain by the counterplot I had devised.

"I will not see the Count von Nauheim again;" she said, and her dislike of him was the strongest feeling she expressed. Nor did I grieve at this.

"He will not come here," I said. "I was going to force a quarrel on him, to make that impossible, when he saved me the trouble by putting one on me. I then warned him off the place."

"Good; very good," she cried, her eyes flashing. "If I were to see him again, I could not restrain my hatred. I should tell him exactly how I feel toward him. It is loathsome even to be linked in name with such a man. But as that is settled, I will do whatever you wish. I knew you would be too much for them all, Cousin Hans, if they did not kill you, as I sadly feared they would. I shall never be able to repay you," she added, looking to me and smiling. "If I were only a man, I could——"

"What?" I asked, when she stopped.

"I could at least fight with you instead of being a clog and a drag."

"You are our inspiration," I said earnestly, and at that her cheek flushed, and she cast down her eyes.

"I wish all the trouble were over," she said presently.

"We must not be in too great a hurry. We have done very well so far. A little pluck and dash, and a slice or two of luck, and we shall get through all right. But now tell me, can you think of any place in Braunstadt, or near there where you can go secretly and hide when the moment comes?"

"Why must I be put out of the way in this fashion? It seems like running away at the very moment of peril, and I am not afraid. Do you think I am a coward?"

"This is no question of bravery or cowardice. It is merely a matter of tactics. The very keystone of this inner plot of theirs is that you shall be missing when the cry is raised for you to ascend the throne. To secure that these people will stick at nothing—they would even take your life. Now, for the success of my counter scheme, I must be able to have you at hand just when I want you. That is all important.

"You will have to go to Braunstadt, in apparent compliance with their wishes, in order to be ready for the final *coup*; and we shall show no sign of suspicion; but you will have trusty guards to protect you against attack. My scheme is to let them carry off some one in your place; and for that purpose I shall endeavor to get wind of their plan of abduction. What I wish to do is to shut out suspicion that we have fooled them until it is too late for them to change their plans. Is there any one among your maids whom you could trust to personate you; who is sufficiently like you in height and color, and so on, to be mistaken for you by a stranger, knowing you only by description, or having only seen you once? She would, of course, be dressed to represent you, and she must be sufficiently devoted to you to take a risk and hold her tongue."

"Yes, my dressing maid, Marie, might pass for me under such circumstances, and I would answer for her stanchness."

"Tell her nothing until the time is close at hand.. Then let her know what has to be done. She will wear your dress and will be carried off; you will slip away; and I shall go in a fine rage to Von Nauheim to frighten him from getting to see his captive and thus discover the trick. Your present task, then, will be to get ready for that part of the scheme, and also to think of some safe place to which you can go."

"I will willingly do more, if it will help you," she said.

The completeness of her trust in me was apparent in every word she spoke.

"There will be plenty of exciting work to follow," I replied with a smile, for I was pleased by her eagerness to help. "Your majesty may depend upon it that a throne is not to be gained without a struggle."

"I should make a poor queen," she answered.

"You will make a beautiful one; and if the Altenwalders once get sight of you, they will not readily let you go."

She looked at me earnestly and with half a sigh said:

"You should not pay me empty compliments, Cousin Hans. You should not say things you do not mean."

"Perhaps it would be truer that I must not say all I do mean," I returned, and for the moment my eyes spoke even more than my words, and I made

haste to add in as light a tone as I could: "Your majesty will have at least one devoted subject whatever may happen."

"I believe that with all my heart," she answered, in a tone and with a look of confidence and trust that thrilled me. Then she smiled very slightly and added: "Even one subject may make a kingdom—though I'm sadly afraid I should not be the ruler of even such a realm."

I longed to turn her jest to earnest and assure her that if she did not, no one else ever should; but I pulled myself up on the verge and remembered that after all I was an impostor, though loyal enough to her. And so I made no reply, and dared not even look at her.

After a pause she rose and with what sounded like a half suppressed sigh she went away.

I let her go, and it was not until she had left the room that the thought struck me that my silence might have sounded currish and curmudgeonly. Then I would have gone after her and told her, and I made a step toward the door; but the thought of what I should say, and how explain my meaning stopped me, and as I hesitated, Captain von Krugen came in to resume the conference we had commenced during the drive from the station.

CHAPTER XII.—MY SCHEME DEVELOPS.

I TOOK Von Krugen into my confidence as to my discoveries and plans. I showed him the documents I had brought back from Braunstadt; told him of my meeting with Praga; the secret history of the duel which had ended young Gustav's life; and at the close invited him to say plainly what he thought of the counter scheme, and of our chances of carrying it through.

"It is about the only chance," he said. "And once on the throne, there is no reason why the countess should not stay there."

"On the contrary, there are two overpowering reasons—her own disinclination and the attitude of the imperial authorities at Berlin."

"There may be a third," he growled into his beard, looking sharply at me.

"What is that?" I asked, though I could almost guess his meaning. But he turned the question adroitly.

"That her majesty would have little wish for a royal marriage with an imperially selected consort chosen by Berlin. Her majesty has a heart, unfortunately—and God bless her for it."

"That will all be as she pleases," said I quietly. "At any rate, our purpose is to give her the opportunity of declining the throne and to save her from these villains who would hound her down."

His face grew as dark as night.

"God, if that villain ever dares to cross her path again, I'll run my sword through his carcass if I die the next minute; and if he doesn't come near her, I'll seek him out the moment this business is through and make him fight me. He has put not one but a thousand insults on me—and he a traitor all the time. And to think the prince believed in him implicitly to the last. And so did I."

"Maybe the prince had not the private knowledge of the man that I had,

nor had you," I said unguardedly. My companion started and looked at me in such surprise that I saw my blunder in a moment.

"You had known him previously?" he asked slowly.

"I had known of him," I answered in a tone of indifference. "It's a long story, and I may tell it you some day."

"It is not for me to question your highness, of course, but I should never betray a confidence," he replied, piqued, as I thought, that I said no more; and for the moment I was hugely tempted to tell him the whole story.

It might be of enormous value to have a staunch ally in my full confidence for the task I had to carry through; but, on the other hand I could not tell how such a man would care to take his orders from an ex play actor, and I decided that I dared not run a risk at such a crisis. So I held my tongue and sat as if my thoughts were busy with our plans.

"There is much to do, captain," I said at length; "and we must waste as little time as possible in consultation. In the first place, we have to keep open a means of communicating with Praga. Are you too well known in Braunstadt to go backwards and forwards?"

"I fear so; but there is Steinitz. He is scarcely known at all there; but he has not yet returned from where you sent him."

I had forgotten altogether about him and his mission; and now that the matter was recalled to me, the length of his absence gave me an uneasy twinge. There must be some very serious cause for so long a delay.

"He should have been back some days ago," I replied slowly. "Probably he will be here today or tomorrow at latest; and that will be in time for our purpose. I myself shall return to Braunstadt in a day or two; but I have purposely made no appointment as yet, and shall make none till the eve of my going, because if my absence from here were to be known in advance, it might probably be the signal for some attempt against the Countess Minna."

"How shall you foil the attempt when it does come?" asked Von Krugen.

"By vigilance mainly; but I mean also to appear to play into this Baron Heckscher's hands, while in reality forcing them. I shall see him and tell him that all here will be in Braunstadt two days before the court ball. That will give them time to make their plans to strike during those two days. Further, my present idea is that for the whole of those two days the character of the countess shall be doubled; this waiting maid of hers will be dressed precisely as she herself is dressed the whole time, and except when any one comes to the house who knows the countess by sight, the girl will be the countess to every one. This means that the servants we take with us must be strangers, with the exception of one or two on whom we can rely implicitly. And I depend on you to make the selection."

"There are several here for whom I would answer as for myself; but isn't there a risk in so long a doubling of the parts?"

"Maybe; but we must be content to take it. My object is so to arrange matters that we ourselves shall virtually select the moment when they will try to get hold of my cousin. Thus I shall make it quite plain to them that during every moment of every hour she is in Braunstadt she will be strictly watched and guarded by us; but I shall manage to let a weak link appear in

the chain, and I have chosen this one. During the two days I shall give it out that my cousin is not well, and can only receive one or two persons. But there is to be a reception at the palace by the king on the afternoon of the day of the court ball, and I shall let it appear that our vigilance must be relaxed on the return drive from the palace to the house. It will seem an excellent opportunity for them. But while the countess shall go herself to the reception, I shall arrange for the maid to take her place on the return drive with the Baroness Gratz, and my cousin will make a sufficient change of dress in the retiring rooms to enable her to leave the palace unknown."

"But the Baroness Gratz."

"You have no doubt of her loyalty?" I asked sharply. "Speak out plainly if you have."

"None in the least. I have no cause. I meant what of the danger to her?"

"There will be little or none. They may indeed be glad to let her get away, while they will do her no harm, even if they keep her prisoner. But the points in favor of such a scheme outweigh all against it. It will suit both them and us to have the abduction made as close to the time of the ball as possible. Them, because we should then have no time to make a disturbance; us, because the shorter time we have to keep watch over Von Nauheim to prevent his finding out the deception the better. A few hours later we shall be absolute masters of the situation."

"It's a scheme that stirs one's blood," cried Von Krugen warmly. "But those few hours will be anxious ones."

"Meanwhile the Duke Marx will have been caught in the toils set for him and will be in our power; the king will be taken at the ball, and thus our whole course will be clear. The mimic ceremony of abdication will take place, the cry will be raised for the Queen Minna, and just when they are chuckling that she cannot be found, I shall lead her forward and put her in the place of honor, and make some sort of speech in her name—probably to the effect that she will take time to consider her course. They will thus be caught like rats in a hole they themselves have undermined; and there will be a pretty tableaux."

"And then?"

"Well, our first step will be to look out for ourselves. The attack on me and you will commence at the moment they believe they have outwitted us; and the danger will spread to us all the instant they find we have outwitted them. But our holding of their duke as a hostage will disarm them."

"You are sure of Praga and that he can get hold of the duke?"

"I am sure of no one but you," I returned; "and of nothing except of things as they occur from hour to hour. We can only lay our plans and do our best to carry them out; but in such a case, any instant may see the unexpected happening and the shipwreck of the best laid scheme. But I like Praga's lever—a woman is a most useful mechanism when you understand how to use her, and when I left Praga every vein of him was burning with a raging lust for revenge. And he is a Corsican. But if that part of the scheme fails, we must patch up another way, that's all. I mean to be stopped by nothing."

"By Heaven, but you're a man I love to follow," cried my companion, his eyes kindling with enthusiasm. Then I saw his expression change, and he peered curiously at me. "And to think you've never been anything but a student. One might think you had lived in the atmosphere of intrigue all your life. The prince little knew you. He believed you were a milksop. How he would have loved you for a man after his own heart. Some one must have been lying to him sorely about you."

"Dead slanders are of no import to us, captain, nor living flattery," I said shortly. "We have to plan out our respective work and to set about doing it;" and with that I told him precisely that part of the plan which would fall to his share, and gave him suggestions as to the best way of carrying it out.

When I had fully instructed him, I sent him away and mapped out in my thoughts the further developments I had yet to plan.

The absence of Steinitz gave me much uneasiness. It seemed so grossly out of prospective that a big scheme, such as was on hand, should be endangered by a trumpery little matter like the selling of a couple of farms. Yet that was the fear I had. If Steinitz had been able to find Von Fromberg and to give him my message, he ought to have been back long since; but if he had not found the man, I could not stop the sale of the property. Yet if it went on, it was almost certain that the old lawyer would in some way get into communication with the men who were selling the place for Von Fromberg, and my identity would at once be questioned.

I would have paid the money, of course, willingly enough, but obviously I could not buy an estate from myself. Again I could not get over the difficulty in any such way as I had employed with Praga—that it was a freak.

The more I considered the thing the easier it appeared to me that I might be tripped up and exposed through it; and when the whole of that day passed without the return of Steinitz, my anxiety grew fast.

He arrived on the following afternoon, but he brought no relief with him. He had not found Von Fromberg. He had gone to Charnes, and had arrived there after the wedding had taken place, and then he had set out to follow the bride and bridegroom on their tour.

He had traced them from hotel to hotel, to Nancy, Bar-le-Duc, Rheims, Amiens, and thence to Paris; but in the French capital all sign of them was lost, and after making many useless inquiries there he had deemed it best to return to me and bring back the letter. I told him he had done right; but the incident added to my disquiet. It was such a contemptibly little thing—and yet, like a poisonous pin prick, it threatened to gangrene the whole venture.

To add to my annoyance and perplexity, moreover, the old lawyer came to me again on the following day to tell me that further negotiations had taken place for the sale of the farms; and he pestered me to know whether I really meant to sell them out of the family, and whether the Count von Nauheim, as the Countess Minna's future husband, ought not to be told of the matter. His manner showed that he had a suspicion that something was being kept from him, and he resented it strongly.

It was obvious, of course, that if he went to Von Nauheim, the latter would

jump at the chance of giving me trouble, and that if any suspicions were even hinted to him, the results might be exceedingly awkward. Yet I could do nothing; and I was so irritated by the lawyer's persistence, that I sent him away with a sharp reply that if he wished to retain my business he had better mind his own.

I could see he was vastly astonished at this, and I more than half repented my words; but he had gone before I had quite recovered my temper. It was unbearable, however, that just when I had all the weight of a really important crisis on my shoulders I should be worried by a trumpery thing of this sort. I let him go, therefore, and tried to dismiss the matter from my thoughts, while I went on with the completion of my plans.

Everything else went as well as we could have wished. Minna herself entered heart and soul into the work; and in the many interviews we had during the next few days I could not have wished for a more loyal and trustful ally. Our little confidential conferences drew us very close together, moreover, and I saw with great delight that her spirits brightened.

The preparations for the critical work in Braunstadt occupied her so fully that her thoughts were taken away from the grief caused by the death of her father, while the belief that success in our venture would open up a new life for her by freeing her from the marriage with Von Nauheim, and from the dreaded responsibilities of the throne, raised hopes which brought with them happiness such as she had not known for months.

"I owe it all to you, cousin," she said once, for she grew to speak with absolute candor and unrestraint to me. "If only you had come to Gramberg earlier, I am sure you would have persuaded by father to abandon the scheme altogether; although I think sometimes that——"

"Well?" I asked, when she paused.

"That it is a good thing you did not come earlier." Her eyes were laughing, and the light in them was a pleasing thing to see.

"Perhaps it is. But why do you think so?"

"You have a way of making unpleasant things pleasant; and you might have persuaded me to do what he wished."

"There are not many women who would need much persuasion to be a queen."

"Without conditions, perhaps."

There is one condition I would never have advocated," said I, raising my eyes to hers. "But you will be a queen after all, and we, your humble servants, wishful only to obey your royal commands."

"I have settled one of the first uses I shall make of my power," she said, looking up and speaking as if seriously.

"And that will be?"

"You will be the object of it. I shall issue an order in council—privy council?"

"'Privy council!' You are getting learned in the jargon of state. I am afraid your privy council will be a very small one."

"Yes," she cried, nodding her head and smiling. "We two. And the order will be that my chief councilor shall tell me the story of his life. If you

won't tell it to your cousin, you must tell it to your queen. And I know there are secrets in it. You think I don't take notice of you, I suppose, and never know when your thoughts are slipping away to the past and never see that you fence with my questions and glide away so cleverly from the little traps I lay. You mustn't think because you would make me a queen, that I have ceased to be a woman—and being a woman, am curious."

"We have no time in these days——"

"There you go," she laughed. "I know what you'll say. You never think of the past because you are so busy thinking of all this business; that when a man is planning a big scheme like this, and has all the details to arrange, he has no time, etc. But you have a secret, Cousin Hans; a secret that is never out of your thoughts; that has nothing to do with all this fresh trouble and intrigue; that took you away from the castle for two days just after you arrived; and that has written its lines on your face. That may be because you can find no one to tell it to. Of course, you think of me only as a girl—you self contained, strong men always do that—and that I should make no sort of a friend to be trusted with secrets. And yet"—she paused, and laying her hand gently on mine said softly and wishfully—"you have done so much for me, I should like to be a little help to you. Can I, cousin? I'm not queen yet, you know, and cannot command. I'm only a grateful girl, and can do no more than ask."

I was not a little disconcerted to find that she had been watching me so closely, and I could not remain untouched by the last little appeal. But I could not reply to it.

"You are a stanch little comrade," I answered; "but we must put off the story until the queen commands."

"That is at least an open postponement, if not a frank refusal. But the queen will command, cousin. I want to know why you would not come here at first; what made you change your mind; how it was that all our ideas about you were wrong; why you are so different from what we all expected—oh, there are a thousand questions that sting the tip of my tongue with the desire to ask them."

"You think a student cannot also be a man of affairs," I said, divided between pleasure at her interest in me and perplexity at her questions.

"But you are not even a student. You never open a book; you never quote things—ah, now you start, because I have watched you. I can read your eyes, although you think you can drape them with the curtains of impassiveness. But your wit is not always on guard to draw the curtains close enough. Yes, that's better; now, they are saying nothing."

All this time she had been looking straight into my eyes and laughing in gleeful triumph. And I found it embarrassing enough. Then she changed suddenly and said: "Does my teasing worry you and weary you, cousin? I can school my curiosity if it does. But you will tell me all some day?"

"Is that schooling it?" I asked, and she laughed again. "Yes, I will tell you some day what there may be to tell. But it could do no good to do so yet."

"Is it a sad secret?" she began again, after half a minute's silence, and

would no doubt have gone on with her pretty cross examination had we not, fortunately for me, been interrupted by a servant, who brought word that Steinitz, whom I had sent to Braunstadt, had returned and was asking to see me instantly.

"I hope there is no trouble," said Minna, looking alarmed.

"I anticipate none; no more than that is, than that we must break off our conference."

"You have given me your promise," she said.

"I ought to have made a condition—that you do not read me quite so carefully," I answered lightly as I rose.

"Then I have read aright? To me your eyes are as books."

"Yet you must be careful how you read them," said I.

"Why?"

"You may chance on the chapter with your name at the head."

"I wish I could;" and she laughed and her eyes brightened. "I would give the world to know whether it is headed Queen of Altenwald, or Cousin Minna. Which is it? Tell me at least so much."

"It may be neither," I answered ambiguously; but she seemed to understand something of my meaning and to be pleased, for her cheeks were aglow with color as I hurried away.

Steinitz was awaiting me impatiently.

"There is ugly news, your highness," he said shortly. "I saw Praga early this morning, and he bade me to urge you to hurry at once to Braunstadt. He has got wind of a move on the other side which he prefers to tell to you alone. He will meet you tomorrow at noon, at the place where you met before, and he declares that the strictest vigilance must be used in regard to the countess, especially while you may be detained away from the castle; and that your visit to the city should be made with the greatest secrecy."

"He told you nothing more of what he had discovered?"

"No more than I say. But I gathered his meaning to be that an attempt of some kind is imminent to get the countess out of our hands here."

This was likely enough, but I did not take so serious a view of the matter as Praga; because I felt that when I had explained our movements to Baron Heckscher he would be almost sure to select the moment when the thing could apparently be done with the least risk of discovery—and that would be at the last moment when Minna returned from the palace after the reception.

At the same time I would go to Braunstadt. I had already planned to go there on the following day in any event, and had announced my intention; but I settled to start at once.

I sent for Von Krugen and told him of my departure, charging him to keep the strictest watch over Minna; and after a very brief interview with her in which she showed the liveliest concern for my safety, mingled, as it pleased me to think, with regret at our separation, I started with Steinitz on what I knew might be a critical expedition.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Fighting against heavy odds with friends at times indistinguishable from foes.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

After a few years of roving Maxwell Harvey, who tells the story, finds himself in El Paso, where chance brings him the acquaintance of Philip Melrose, a man from New York City well on in years. Having reason to know Harvey as a fellow possessed of courage and determination, Melrose commissions him in a peculiar service—nothing less than the kidnapping of his niece from her stepfather in the city of Mexico. She is the daughter of Melrose's brother, now dead, who married a Mexican during his consulship; the girl has spent much of her time in the East at school under her uncle's care, and now, knowing that her stepfather is trying to gain possession of her fortune, the old gentleman seeks aid in getting her away entirely from her present environment.

Taking for his companion Theodore Martin, a young doctor out of patients, Harvey sets out for the capital of Mexico, which he reaches after many vicissitudes by the way, for it is a time of civil war. He discovers the house of Don Carlos, where the girl is kept under surveillance, and then, in the hope of learning something useful in regard to it and its master, he makes himself at home in a wine shop near by, seeking to gain a friendly footing with its frequenters by playing cards with a party of them. After playing a short time, he is accused by one of the men of cheating, gets the better of him in a fight, and escapes. Followed, he takes refuge in the house of Don Carlos, where he manages to meet Señora Teresa. While talking they are interrupted, and to escape Harvey jumps from a second story window, landing on a monk.

Again finding himself followed, he hides in a doorway, and by so doing puts his pursuers on another man's track. The latter is soon attacked and Harvey, going to his rescue, finds him to be Francisco Miranda, a person of some note.

Hearing the next morning that there is a warrant for his arrest, Harvey refuses to open his door, emphasizing his statement with a revolver. Later he grants admittance to a man, who claims to bring an important message, whereupon a monk, Fray Ignominus, comes in and offers him freedom if he will tell the whereabouts of Mr. Melrose. Harvey puts him off, and shortly after, meeting Martin, learns that Señorita Teresa is to be taken to a convent. With Martin's aid, Harvey rescues her; but while escorting her to La Puebla they get separated and Harvey is taken prisoner by soldiers under Fray Ignominus and escorted in chains to Chapultepec.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL.

I WAS taken into a large, almost empty room. A few seats or benches were arranged along the walls, and upon one of these I threw myself, my head dropping upon my breast.

My thoughts were unbearable; I was haunted by a miserable fear. I could meet death in the field, or face to face with an adversary—I was not a coward—but the thought of being shot down like a bullock for the shambles, as I was likely to be, seemed to take away all my spirit.

I had not long to remain where I was, however; for in a few minutes I was led out of the room, through a long corridor, down a short flight of steps, and through a dark passage, at the end of which I was thrust into a small cell.

**This story began in the November issue of THE ARGOSY. The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.*

There was straw in one corner, evidently left there to serve as a bed; but it was a wretched place, and so dark that at first I could not see about me. Weary from the journey and the mental strain incident to my being constantly on the watch for an opportunity to escape, I was quite worn out. I fell into a stupor and after a while slept soundly.

When I awoke it was daylight, as I could see by the light which came in faintly through a small window. I closed my eyes and tried to forget where I was, for the dread of my impending fate still haunted me. But I did not sleep again, nor could I forget my surroundings.

The uncontrollable desire to escape, which had continually possessed me ever since my arrest, was again uppermost in my mind. I rose and began a careful examination of the walls of my prison, the door, the floor, everything about me; but it could not have been more securely built had it been hewn from the solid rock, for the stones were large and the floor was of heavy flags.

I quickly discovered that I could not dig my way out, and I knew that, were I to be long confined here, I should run amuck, as prisoners in Spanish fortresses sometimes did, and fall upon my keeper when he opened my cell door. As if in fancy I had him by the throat I took hold of the iron bars of the door, and wrenched and twisted on them with all my strength.

I was strong—stronger than any jailer who might be set over me was likely to be. Then it occurred to me that there were sentries outside; there were high parapets; there was a guard always on duty at the fortress; and my thoughts gave way to cooler reason and better judgment. I would wait my opportunity—possibly bribe my guard. It seemed possible that I might be able to do this.

After a while some food and water was brought me. I questioned the fellow who brought it as to what was likely to be done with me, but either he did not know, or did not wish to give me any information, for he evaded my question. As he left, however, he knavishly informed me that three men were shot that morning.

This information was not calculated to be reassuring, but I received nothing better that day. My summons came the next morning, when it was ordered that I be brought before the commanding officer. I had no intimation of it until the key grated in the lock, the door of my cell swung open on its creaking hinges, and I was conducted along the corridor by the way I had come to a large room—probably used as a council chamber—in the middle of which was a long table strewn with papers.

About the table were seated several officers; one or two of whom looked at me rather sharply as I came in, and I saw that I had little sympathy to expect from them. At the head of the table sat General Marquez; and I soon discovered that I was to be tried before him. I must admit that my heart sank when I learned that he was to be my judge. Before this general, who already had so bloody a record, who placed little value on human life, my case was likely to be quickly disposed of, and with but little ceremony.

One of the officers I will speak of now, for I was shortly to make his acquaintance under rather dramatic circumstances. In fact, I had already met him. This was Don Luis Robolo, the man I had encountered on the

plaza the first time I saw the señorita. He came in late and took no part in the trial, but he watched me closely as if studying my countenance.

An officer, acting as clerk, read the charges against me. I was accused of being a bandit, of having forcibly seized the person of one Señorita Teresa de Ulloa, together with her maid, and the horses and carriages of one Don Carlos de Ulloa, upon the public highway, in defiance of law, and against the safety and dignity of the Republic of Mexico.

I think these were about the words used, though at this time I can not say positively. There were present as witnesses the driver of the carriage, Fray Ignominious, and the officer who had arrested me.

The evidence was brief, merely affirming the truth of the charges brought against me. The driver showed some spleen, declaring that I had attempted to kill him, and that he had escaped only by flight. The monk, I could see, fairly gloated over my discomfiture. I never would have believed that so much malice could have been bound up in one man.

"This man, general," he said, pointing his skinny finger at me, "is an escaped prisoner, having been under arrest before. Not only is he an enemy of the republic, but also an enemy of the Holy Catholic Church. He has insulted its priests, and has uttered blasphemous words. He should receive fifty lashes, and be executed by the garrote."

"I will give him such sentence as I see fit. I do not ask you to dictate to me," replied the general, somewhat fiercely.

"His crime against the church should not go unnoticed."

"With such matters I have nothing to do," said the general, waving his hand, as if to dismiss the subject. But the monk was not to be frowned down, or put off, but was ready with a reply.

"An enemy of the church is an enemy of the state."

"If all churchmen were like you, I would favor the Constitution, and wish a separation of church and state. What have I to do with punishing heretics? Is it not enough that we have all we can do to hunt down and punish those who violate the civil laws, without attempting to establish an inquisition? I will order him shot and end the matter. What more do you want?"

"He has valuable information which he may be made to divulge," replied the monk, with a new inspiration. "This information, when discovered, will add to the power of the church, inasmuch as it will enable the church to bring punishment upon those who are the enemies of the true faith."

The general looked at him questioningly, as if he doubted the truth of his statement, and then replied impatiently:

"The church has quite enough on its hands already with the threatened confiscation of its property."

"The Lord will not suffer the Holy Catholic Church to be deprived of its property by its enemies," returned the monk.

"The Lord will not fight the church's battles for it. Unless the church comes to the aid of those who are fighting for it, it cannot expect to keep its property intact," said the general, frowning.

Fray Ignominious winced at this; but he crossed himself, muttering something under his breath.

"Do you intend to threaten the church?" he asked.

"I intend that you shall know that I have my business, and that you have yours," the general answered. "We have too much before us to waste our time in words."

"What business has this monk to have anything to say in this matter?" demanded one of the officers sharply. "He gave his evidence, and that should end it."

"It was I who gave the information which led to this man's arrest, following him to La Puebla," replied Fray Ignominious.

"Enough," cried the general with a frown, and then turning to me. It was apparent that the monk had made himself obnoxious.

"Have you anything to say for yourself?" he asked.

"I wish to say that I am innocent of the charges brought against me," I replied.

"Innocent! In the face of the evidence offered, you expect us to accept your word that you are innocent?"

"No," I answered, "I did not expect you to accept my word, or believe anything I may say. I am an American, and I demand that I be tried before the American consul."

"Indeed, and you think that every renegade foreigner who is taken in open rebellion against the government is privileged to a hearing before the consul? If you do, you would better get over the notion. If you have any defense to make, you shall make it before me, or not at all."

"I have none to make before you further than what I have already stated," I replied firmly. "Furthermore, I demand that I be tried as is my right, and the right of every American citizen as secured by treaty."

"The treaty is inoperative," he cried. "Your government has already violated it. There is war—that is, overt acts of war have been committed by your country against Mexico. Diplomatic relations have been suspended."

"Then, in this event," I said, "it will not be long before the United States sends an army down here to see that its citizens are protected."

"It will do you no good," he retorted fiercely.

There was a slight interruption, caused by the entrance of Don Carlos. This was the first time I had ever seen him; and, as chance would have it, it was the last time. I would not have known who he was, but General Marquez paused and addressed him by name, asking him if he had something to say.

Don Carlos replied with dignity, that he had nothing to say, more than that he would leave it to the court to dispose of the case as it saw fit.

He had a somewhat haughty bearing, and I think looked upon me as a common malefactor, beneath his notice. He spoke to one or two of the officers, but I did not hear what was said. Before the trial had concluded he was called from the room, and left as abruptly as he had entered.

"Possibly, under the circumstances, it would be best not to act too hastily," suggested one of the officers; whose name I did not learn.

The monk, too, was about to say something more, but General Marquez waived him off. "This is a big ado about a little matter," he said. "The prisoner is no better than an outlaw. I will make an example of him. It will be a lesson for others of his countrymen."

Again the monk made an attempt to say something.

"Enough; I will hear nothing from you," he cried. "Had it not been for your putting in, execution might have been carried out before this. It is ordered——"

At the moment there was so much confusion in the room, and noise without, that he broke off abruptly and rapped for order.

Everything appeared to be lost. I was standing before the general, vainly endeavoring to collect my scattered senses, and to comprehend what was going on about me. I was bewildered; but I remember that the noise and confusion instead of subsiding seemed to increase. An orderly came hurriedly into the room and whispered something to General Marquez, the council was hastily adjourned, and I remained unsentenced.

General Marquez rose from the table at which he was seated, as also did the other officers, and turning to the provost marshal who had me in charge, he directed him to take me to the Prison Militar with the other prisoners. Then, turning to an officer near, he ordered him to have his command under arms at once.

As the officers filed out there was more rattling of swords and clanking of spurs upon the pavement outside. In the space of less than a minute the room was deserted save for myself and the two soldiers who had been guarding me. Fray Ignominious soon returned, a smile of satisfaction on his face, evidently from the knowledge that I was not removed entirely from his power.

Thanks to him, in his zeal to have my punishment prolonged by torture, he had gained for me a respite. In truth, I believe I owe my life to him. A new hope was born in my breast. A Providence which had saved me so far might enable me to escape altogether.

As I was about to be led away Don Luis returned. He came in cautiously, looking about the room to see who was there.

"I have a little business with this fellow," he said, addressing Fray Ignominious. "I would like to be alone."

"Proceed with your business; do not let my presence interfere with it," replied the monk.

"I said that I wished to see him alone," repeated Don Luis.

"Yes, lieutenant."

The monk turned, reluctantly, and left the room. Don Luis stood stiffly in the center of the room and waited until he had gone; then he motioned to the soldiers, and they also retired.

"Now, Señor Harvey," he said, turning upon me with a frown, "it may be that you remember having met me before?"

"I believe that we have met," I replied.

"Yes," he continued. "I sent those fellows out, and got rid of that sneaking monk, as my business was with you personally."

"I am waiting," I replied.

"You are, I understand," he said, without noticing my reply, "in the employ of one Philip Melrose?"

"I am acquainted with Señor Melrose."

"And you are acquainted with his niece, also, Señorita Teresa de Ulloa?" he added.

"I prefer not to talk about the señorita with you," I replied with dignity.

"I have not asked you to talk about her," he replied hotly. "You kidnapped her on the Paseo while I was engaged with the guard. I demand to know where she is."

"Oh, it was you, then, who stopped the carriage!" I exclaimed. "I did not know this before."

"That has nothing to do with what I asked you," he retorted.

"But it makes you out a bandit by your own confession, and you should be shot," I replied quickly.

"I am a gentleman—I am not a bandit," he answered.

"I see, it is your rank that makes what otherwise would be a crime no crime at all. You are certainly fortunate in belonging to a favored class; otherwise you might be shot like any poor wretch unlucky enough to be caught in a bad business."

"You are insolent, señor. You are in my power. A word more from you, and I will order you shot, if in fact I do not run you through."

He looked at me savagely, his hand upon the hilt of his sword, but he did not draw. I was watching him closely, and my seeming composure had something to do with his controlling his anger.

"You are a coward," I said. "Why do you not call to your aid your accomplice, that dog of a monk, Fray Ignominious?"

"He is not my accomplice!" he cried, again flying into a rage. "I have nothing to do with him."

"He certainly would make a most valuable ally."

"*Madre de Dios*, it pleases you, does it? Enough of Fray Ignominious; my business is with you, and I have no time to waste in talk. I want to know where Señorita Teresa is."

"And if I do not choose to tell you?"

"So much the worse for you, then," he replied. "But if you give me the information I ask—I can do something for you."

"It seems," I said, "that I am between the devil and the deep sea, but whether you are the deep sea or the devil, I cannot say."

"I will make you swallow your words," he cried, drawing his sword.

But evidently he thought better of it, for he sheathed it almost immediately; and well he might, for I would have struck him down with a chair had he come at me.

"I will ask you again where the señorita is," he said.

"And I will say that I do not know," I replied, with perfect truth.

"Do you think that I will believe that?" he said.

"Believe it or not, as you like," I replied; "it is the truth."

"It is a lie!" he hissed.

"Say that again and I will strangle you with my naked hands."

"You talk bravely for a man who stands by his grave. One moment more and I will call the guard."

"I have answered you the truth," I replied, "but if I had anything to conceal from you, do you think that I would be afraid to answer you?"

"You shall have a chance to make a different answer. We have devices

for the purpose of forcing information. Were it not for that, I would have run you through."

"Possibly you would not be afraid to do that, seeing that I am unarmed," I said.

"I wish you to understand that there is not a better swordsman in the cavalry than I," he replied proudly.

I was somewhat amused at his vanity and his haughty demeanor. As to his statement regarding his skill as a swordsman, I had occasion to remember that afterwards.

"You refuse to give me the information I ask?" he demanded.

"I have none to give you," I replied.

"You will repent your action," he cried. "Ho, there, the guard."

Instantly the door was thrown open, and half a dozen soldiers came crowding into the room, all with drawn weapons, as if they had expected to meet with armed resistance.

CHAPTER XIV.—WHEN MONK TURNS ASSASSIN.

"AWAY with him!" cried Don Luis, drawing his sword and pointing to me. "See that he is kept in close confinement, and under guard. I will see that the man who allows him to escape is shot in his place."

Two of the guards, one on either side of me, seized hold of my arms and made a great show of force in removing me from the room, although I had offered no resistance, nor had I attempted to escape. They were, I concluded, recruits, and had seen but little service; for, with all their display of zeal, they performed their duty awkwardly and carelessly.

As we passed out of the door I saw that Fray Ignominious was waiting for us. He followed on, close behind, as we went along the corridor. I might have been going to my death, so melancholy a procession did we form. I thought how many times similar processions had gone out from Mexican prisons, accompanied by a black robed monk—of the ancient Aztecs, condemned to death on some frivolous charge, possibly to be burnt at the stake as heretics; of the no less unfortunate prisoners of war, led away to be shot; and there was always a monk present, more like a herald of death than a messenger of peace.

As we left the corridor I glanced back over my shoulder. Fray Ignominious was still following, his face grim and hard set, and his head bowed. I shuddered. Somehow his presence had always been so ominous of evil that I shrank from him. It was suggestive of death and mortality, and of the end which seems to await every one. I felt as though a skeleton were stalking on behind me.

I was led into the center of a paved court, where there was assembled a small batch of prisoners, apparently recently arrived, for they appeared tired and worn and their clothes were covered with dust. They eyed me closely, holding back by themselves and leaving me standing alone. I tried to engage in conversation one or two whom I thought the most approachable, but though they answered me politely they were not disposed to talk.

On the whole they maintained a sullen indifference regarding what was going on about them. I learned that they were military prisoners, or rebels; as their captors called them, and had been captured under arms. They were to be transferred to the Prison Militar, the same prison in which I was to be confined.

Watching his opportunity, when the attention of the guard was directed another way, Fray Ignominious made his way to my elbow.

"How like you Don Luis?" he asked.

"I do not claim him as a friend," I replied.

"He threatens you?"

"I care nothing for his threats."

"You had made his acquaintance before today?"

"I had met him."

"Don't trust him. He may promise, but he will not keep his promises. You will do better to listen to me."

"Possibly," I replied, yet not without recalling the character of the wretch who was addressing me.

"You rejected my proposal when I would have secured your liberty. You escaped, but how soon was it before you were rearrested? You despise me. You would change masters, would you? Instead of liberty, you will find a dungeon waiting for you!"

"As I said, I do not fear Don Luis. Neither do I fear you. You came a cringing witness against me before the court this morning. Do you think that I did not notice with what contempt you were treated—how utterly insignificant you were? Why, I too, though a prisoner, have nothing but contempt for you."

"They shall feel my power, as shall you also, Señor Harvey," he muttered, clenching his fists, and frowning.

"Indeed," I rejoined, turning away from him.

"Wait," he cried, taking me by the sleeve of my coat. "Those who set themselves against such as I, set themselves against the Holy Catholic Church. This is something they should have considered."

"They doubtless know their own business," I replied.

"And I know my power," he said.

"Your power!"

"Yes, my power, which is the power of the church. My enemies are its enemies, and they shall know its strength. The army moves in a few days, and the constitutional government must fall. In a month's time, the church will be supreme—its property secure—its authority unquestioned! And then, its enemies!"

"You speak rather confidently," I said.

"Because I know of what I am speaking," he replied. "You shall see that I speak the truth," he continued, forgetting that an hour before he would have had me garroted. "I warn you against Don Luis. Believe not what he may say to you, neither have faith in his promises, for he is not to be trusted. There are others who have greater power than he possesses."

Without waiting for a reply, he moved away, shuffling along the pave-

ment. It would seem that I was being played between the two of them, each afraid of the other, and of me. From which I had the most to fear, it was hard for me to tell—probably from the monk, as he was most obnoxious to me, being a low lived fellow, seemingly without honor or principle. Don Luis was a gentleman in outward demeanor at least. It was perhaps fortunate for me that they had come into conflict, as one would try to prevent the success of the other.

As I stood there in the court I noticed that officers and soldiers were constantly coming and going. Some of the soldiers had taken the liberty to talk with the prisoners, and had been permitted to mingle more or less with them. The guard was careless, and disposed to relax their vigilance. There appeared to be a lack of discipline everywhere—either a want of authority in the officers, or a disregard of it in the men.

Watching my opportunity, when the attention of the soldiers was directed another way, I worked along to one side and slipped past them, mingling with the soldiers who were off duty. Had I not been conspicuous on account of my clothes, or, rather, from the lack of a uniform, I should have attempted to pass out, following a company which was about to leave. As it was, I was as much a prisoner after I had got past the guard as I was before; and, being unfamiliar with the place, I was at a loss which way to turn.

One thing was of assistance to me, and that was the dilapidated condition of the fortress; it having not been repaired or rebuilt after the attack made upon it by our troops in the Mexican War, when it was carried by assault. Parts of it were in ruins, and so offered places of concealment.

Leading from the court was a short paved alley, and quickly passing along this I came to a part of the building which was used as a stable. I could find no door which led out of the inclosure, and I doubt if there was one.

But there was a door which I thought might lead to another passage; this I forced, only to find myself in a large room which was used as a store or supply room. All about were boxes and bales of goods, supplies of different kinds. Hearing some one coming, I clambered over the stores and hid behind some sacks of beans.

I had not more than reached my place of concealment, crouching down among the sacks, when there were soldiers at the door. They made a hurried search of the place, yet pried into every corner and behind every bale of goods. One of them climbed up on the sacks and stood directly above me, but I escaped being discovered on account of the darkness of the place. It was a relief to me when I heard them go away. Having so far escaped them, I was now encouraged to believe that I would in some way escape them altogether.

I lay in my place of concealment, it seemed to me, hours, afraid that I would be seen if I ventured out of it. At different times during the day men came to the storeroom, but left again without discovering me. My quarters were uncomfortably small; I was cramped and crowded, and altogether very miserable. I was hungry, but I could not eat uncooked beans.

At last, after listening carefully and hearing no sound of any one being about, I left my retreat and began a search for something that might satisfy

my hunger. I could find nothing but some barley, and for want of something better I chewed some of this. But I was unaccustomed to horse fare. It only served in a poor way to stay the cravings of my stomach.

As I seemed to be alone, for I could hear no one outside, I sat down on one of the sacks of barley to rest. I must have been lost in thought, for I did not hear the door open; but upon looking up suddenly, I saw a long robed figure standing on the threshold. It was Fray Ignominious.

I was taken so completely by surprise, that I did not even rise, but sat there staring at him. For a full minute, it seemed, he stood there barring the doorway. He had crossed himself when he first saw me, and muttered something in Latin. Recovering myself, I was about to dash past him and out of the door, when from somewhere about his clothes he drew a knife and made a savage assault upon me.

Now, I have always believed that a man should fight with his own weapons when it is possible for him to do so, and as craft and cunning was my monk's weapons, and his robe his shield, he should have been content with these, and left the knife for those given to its use. A monk makes a poor soldier, for fighting is not his business, and certainly it is unbecoming in him to take the rôle of an assassin.

Had he been content to leave violence to others, and had not taken too much upon himself, doubtless he would have lived many years to come, and might in time have reformed from evil ways and become a useful zealot of the church. As it was, without any plotting or premeditation on my part, he met death in a most singular manner, as will be seen hereafter.

Seeing the raised knife, and being myself unarmed, I defended myself from his murderous assault as best I could. As he was about to strike, grasping him by the wrist, I threw up his arm, and at the same time swung my left foot around with such force that I quite took him off his feet, causing him to fall upon the pavement with such suddenness and force that his breath seemed to have been knocked out of his body. As I looked at him, lying at my feet, I was afraid that he would never breathe again. I had not meant to kill him, and I did not want his blood upon my conscience.

It would have been difficult for me to explain the accident, had I been compelled to; and I doubted if any explanations I could make would be acceptable to those who would make inquiry concerning the matter. I thought it best not to be found where I was. When I emerged from the storeroom, which I very soon did, I wore the cowl of a monk. And for the monk who had lost his senses I left a badly fitting coat which at one time belonged to a Spanish gentleman, and had been borrowed without so much as asking the consent of the owner.

Under cover of my disguise I found no difficulty in making my way from the building, and in passing along the court unmolested. A party of troopers were going away, and I followed them. I reached the outer works unchallenged. In truth, no one paid any attention to me whatever.

A winding road led down from the fortress. At the foot of the hill was timber; here the ground was broken, as at some former time trenches had been dug and breastworks thrown up. I had gone the greater part of the

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distance down the slope; the trees were just ahead of me, and I was congratulating myself on my escape, when I heard a cry behind. Instinctively I turned my head. I saw a Mexican without hat, apparently half dressed, rush past the sentinels.

How it happened I could never tell exactly. It all occurred in a very short time. The Mexican was shouting and gesticulating in the most frantic way, as if he was quite bereft of his reason; and indeed he must have been, to disregard the challenge of the sentinels as he did. They shouted to him to stop, but he appeared not to hear them.

He was shouting and motioning to some one ahead of me, so it seemed. Again the guard called for him to stop, and I saw them level their muskets; but he kept on, jumping upon the parapet. Then two shots, in quick succession, rang out upon the air; he threw up his hands, fell headlong over the parapet, and rolled down the embankment. As he fell I saw that he wore a gentleman's dress coat. I could not be mistaken as to the coat.

For a moment I stood paralyzed, not so much from the sight of such a tragic death, as from the fact that I realized that the unfortunate man was Fray Ignominious. Then, becoming conscious of my own danger, I hurried on, gaining the shelter of the trees.

From a feeling of veneration for the robes I wore, however ill suited they may have been to him who wore them before me, I reverently made the sign of the cross as I had so often seen it made by others. It was an almost involuntary act; and yet, done, I believe, with a feeling of sincerity and thankfulness for my escape.

CHAPTER XV.—SEÑOR AMERICANO.

EARLY in the evening, when the shadows of night had already begun to gather, pursuing my way along the sandy Paseo, which leads from the Castle of Chapultepec to the City of Mexico, I must have passed as a Franciscan monk. To the casual observer I could not have looked unlike one of that order, my gown coming to my ankles, the white hat I wore pulled down so as to shade my face. I turned neither to the right nor to the left, but plodded slowly on my way, affecting to be indifferent to everything about me.

A squad of cavalry dashed past, but I did not look up. Several soldiers, laughing, and indulging in coarse jests, overtook and passed me; an officer, superbly mounted, accompanied by a bodyguard, rode close to me, and had I wished I could have stretched out my hand and touched his horse; a carriage, hurriedly returning to the city—for it was past the usual hour for driving—wheeled swiftly by; now and then a peon saluted me, but no one else appeared to take the slightest notice, or paid the least attention to the lone monk, any more than they would have done to any common beggar.

How could they know that I was an escaped prisoner, and in momentary fear of being seized, stripped of my disguise, and returned to my dungeon? In the shadows of the evening it was probably unnoticed that I now and then cast furtive glances about me, and that I heaved a sigh of relief when the party of troopers were well past me.

When I reached the city I stopped at the public fountain, drank long and deeply, and then went on. Half an hour later I entered the office of Messrs. Smith & Rivera, and inquired for the senior member of the firm, though it was long past business hours. Mr. Smith was in and came forward to meet me, though not without some show of annoyance.

"You wish to see me?" he asked with a frown.

"I called in regard to a little matter of business. I wish to talk with you privately," I explained.

"I do not know what your business is, or why you should have any with me," replied the banker. "You will oblige me if you will state briefly the nature of it."

"I am under the necessity of drawing on you for some money," I said.

"Drawing on me!" he exclaimed, looking searchingly into my face.

The banker's countenance seemed gradually to change from surprise to astonishment. "What," he stammered, "this is Mr. Harvey? Can it be——"

"The same, señor," I replied, "and I will again ask to be permitted to see you alone."

"Oh, yes, possibly we would better be alone," he managed to answer; then led the way to his private office.

"Why do you come to see me in this garb?" he inquired, after he had shut the door and we were alone.

"A man may have reasons for not wishing to be recognized," I replied. "And a choice of disguises may not be offered. The one I have was adopted from necessity."

"Fool, are you a madman?" he cried.

"I may be a fool—not a madman," I answered quietly.

"Oh, yes," he went on, "I can understand very well why you have reasons for not wishing to be recognized! But you will be discovered soon enough in that gown! Let me tell you that you could hardly assume a more dangerous disguise than that, for when it is discovered that you are an impostor, you will have a mob at your heels."

His expressions of solicitude for my safety were rather more earnest than I should have expected from him; for I knew that he did not like me any too well—he had said as much.

"I assure you that I have no desire to continue wearing this garb," I replied coolly. "I shall not be slow in discarding it when I can safely do so."

"Safely discard that gown!" he cried. "You cannot safely wear it! Better wear nothing than that. Come, I will give you a coat, and you can leave the gown here in my private office, though I would not want to have it discovered here."

For some reason, which I could not have explained had I tried, I did not accept this offer, however friendly it may have appeared. For one thing, I did not wish to accept any favors from him after the repeated rebuffs I had received from him on former occasions. I told him that I had come into his office a monk, and I would go out a monk. I believe now that it was well that I did.

"Keep your gown!" he growled. "It takes a Mexican to be a devil, but a Yankee to be a daredevil. You may have heard that there was a man murdered at the Los Toros de Muerte about a week ago. It is reported that his murderer is an American. The police have a good description of him, and there is little doubt but that he will be found."

As he told me this, I was aware that he was watching me intently all the time. He probably suspected me of committing the deed, and the question was asked for the purpose of drawing me out.

"Was the fellow killed?" I asked, turning upon him so suddenly that he started as if caught in some deceit.

I had not believed that I had killed the man, but I knew that disagreeable complications sometimes set in from a wound apparently insignificant.

"Killed—who? I don't understand," he stammered.

"You said that there was a man murdered at the Los Toros de Muerte?"

"No—that is, he is not dead yet."

"No doubt he deserved to have been killed," I suggested, with an assumed air of indifference.

"That may be," he replied, "but it will not relieve the one who committed the deed from punishment if he is apprehended."

"A quarrel in a pulque shop is not an unusual occurrence, is it?" I asked.

"No; and yet there are circumstances which make this one significant. It was on the same night that the house of Don Carlos de Ulloa was entered—no doubt by the same person. The man, whoever he was, gained entrance by a subterfuge; and it is supposed that he made his escape through a window which opens on to a balcony, and then dropped to the pavement.

"His object in gaining entrance to the house may be surmised, and inferences drawn from the fact that only the next evening the Señorita Teresa was kidnapped when riding on the Paseo. So high handed a procedure was this, and so boldly executed, that the police are likely to make vigorous effort to bring the offenders to punishment. In fact, Don Carlos is likely to make things warm for some one."

"A very strange occurrence, that one man should get in so much trouble in so short a time," I replied.

"Yes, very strange," said Mr. Smith.

"It is well known, is it not," I asked, "that the Paseo, as well as all roads outside the city, are infested by bandits?"

"Ah—yes, to be sure. But in this instance there are circumstances which lead to the belief that it was not the act of bandits."

"An elopement, possibly," I suggested.

"I don't understand," replied Mr. Smith, looking at me inquiringly.

"Neither do I. But do the police know where Don Luis Robolo was on that memorable night?"

"How do I know?" he asked, somewhat annoyed at the question. "I am only speaking from hearsay—and of those things which are commonly known. The affair has caused some talk."

He had been watching me intently. I had endeavored to betray no emotion; but he was a man possessed of a keen faculty of discernment when it

came to reading men. As I looked up I caught his eye. I felt that he knew I had been the chief actor in the drama. I no longer cared to attempt concealment, but I was trying to determine in my own mind what part this strange man was playing.

I could not believe him guilty of duplicity—he was an American. But certainly he had some purpose of his own in questioning me, and other interests than those of his client, Philip Melrose. I would not have trusted him, even after the first time I met him, and I wondered that Mr. Melrose trusted him. Possibly he had not trusted him further than to make him his banker.

“Don Luis is a suitor for the hand of the señorita, I believe,” I said, after a little.

“So I have heard,” he said. “Her father, Don Carlos, has all along refused his consent; but I understand he has now withdrawn all objections.”

“This certainly is an interesting little romance,” I observed, “but I suppose we will have to wait a while for the concluding chapters.”

Mr. Smith looked at me sharply, frowned, and then abruptly changed the subject.

“You wished to see me on a matter of business?”

“Yes, I called for the purpose of drawing on you for some money,” I explained. “I am in urgent need of funds, or I would not have come at this hour.”

“I am sorry,” he replied, “but I cannot advance you any more money.”

“What do you mean?” I demanded. “There should be a thousand pesetas here for me. I have Mr. Melrose’s order to draw upon him, through you, at any time, and for any amount I may need.”

I was a little nettled at the bluff way in which he had tried to put me off. Besides, I had every reason to believe that he was not stating the truth, and I determined that if there was no money for me I would know the reason why there was none.

“Mr. Melrose has not been heard from since a week ago today,” replied the banker, moving uneasily in his chair. “Where he is, I do not know. Detectives have been looking for him, but as yet they have found no clue which gives them any idea as to what has become of him.

“It was scarcely possible for him to leave the country without being discovered. Of course, we do not know that he has left the city, neither do we know that he is alive. If he is not alive, my authority as his agent has ceased, and I cannot legally pay out his money.”

“You need feel no uneasiness in that regard,” I replied. “The money was placed here to my credit, and is due me when I choose to call for it. It has already been paid over to you on my account. Furthermore, you have no reason for assuming that Mr. Melrose is dead because you cannot at this moment locate him.”

“You appear to have a theory of your own regarding Mr. Melrose’s whereabouts,” he said. “You would do us a great favor by finding him.”

“Why was he so anxious to find Mr. Melrose?” I asked myself. Certainly, it did look suspicious—as if Mr. Smith was in some conspiracy against him.

"In good time, no doubt, you will learn where Mr. Melrose is," I replied. "But I will say, that I have not the least idea myself where he is. As for the money, that had been arranged for in view of the possibility of this very contingency arising."

He looked up quickly, as much as to say that I knew more than I would admit.

"What do you want with the money?" he demanded.

"It matters not what I want it for," I replied. "It is enough that you have instructions to pay it to me on demand."

He winced a little at this.

"But Mr. Melrose's disappearance—it makes quite a difference. The legal status is changed."

"It is not changed in the least," I replied, out of patience with the man. "Mr. Melrose will make his appearance, or if he does not, I will find him in time."

"Your task is likely to be a fool's errand," he replied, with a sinister smile. "In the first place you had better never have come to this country; your foolhardiness will cost you your life."

"That is my lookout," I retorted. "What I want to know is, am I, or am I not, to receive the money?"

"Well, as I said, I cannot act as Mr. Melrose's agent if he is dead—my authority has ceased. If I should let you have the money it would be at my own risk."

"Do you know that Mr. Melrose is dead?" I demanded.

"No, only that I fear he is," said the crafty banker. "His disappearance——"

"I do not care anything about his disappearance!" I interrupted, somewhat angrily. "He has a right to go and come as he pleases. Furthermore, it is no affair of yours where he is, or when he goes and comes."

"He has not necessarily elected you to be his guardian, because he has been so unfortunate as to make you his banker. I want five hundred pesetas; and, what is more, I am going to have the money."

"Will not half that sum do?" he asked, beginning to weaken. "I would perhaps be willing to assume the risk of paying you two hundred and fifty."

"No, that will not do," I replied firmly. "I have named a much smaller sum than I am liable to need for my expenses."

"If you will call tomorrow morning, I will see what I can do."

"I will not call tomorrow morning," I replied. "It is necessary that I have the money now."

He turned slowly and rather reluctantly to his safe, opened it, took out a bag of money, and counted out five hundred pesetas to me. "This is the full amount," he said, as he shoved it toward me.

"Thank you," I replied. "I shall try to make it answer for my present needs."

He was very particular to have me sign a receipt for the money, as, of course, I was willing to do. After doing which, I wished him good evening and took my leave.

I will confess that the future looked very dark to me at this time. True, I had regained my liberty, but I was among enemies, and knew not a person to whom I could turn as a friend. Not even when I had stood before the military tribunal, expecting every moment to hear the sentence of death pronounced upon me, had I felt so disheartened as now. The excitement which had sustained me then had passed away.

I was a fugitive from justice; my plans discovered; I had half executed my mission, and failed. Even the señorita mistrusted me. Philip Melrose had fled the country or was in concealment, no doubt in danger of his life should he be discovered. I knew not what to attempt, what move to make, or where to go.

I was in great danger if I remained in the capital, and in equally as great danger if I returned to La Puebla. I was reminded of the danger of being discovered in the disguise I wore by seeing two monks of the order I represented approaching me. To avoid meeting them I crossed the street.

Occupied with my thoughts, I had walked on for some distance, pursuing the way to my former lodgings. Why, unless from a matter of habit, I should have gone back there, I cannot explain; for it was the one place, above all others, which I had every reason to avoid. I suddenly realized my peril when I came in sight of the house, and quickly turned away. I had gone but a few steps, however, when I heard footsteps behind me.

"Señor Americano!" I heard some one say.

Something familiar in the voice caused me to turn.

"Señor Harvey, it is you?"

I could hardly believe my eyes. It was Pedro who spoke. I grasped him by the hand. I could have thrown my arms around him and embraced him, so glad was I to see some one who had a friendly word for me.

"Pedro," I cried, "how did you know that it was me?"

"I saw you come out of the banker's place, and then I followed you. It was dark, and you did not see me."

"Pedro, I have escaped," I said.

"*Si, señor. Por aquí, si le guste,*" he whispered, taking hold of my sleeve. "I will find you a place to hide—come, they will not find you."

I was glad enough to go with him. Where should I have gone had I not met him? Truly he was a friend in need. His pleasure, too, at seeing me, and his solicitude for my safety, was apparent.

"How came you here—and the señorita, where is she—what do you know?" I asked eagerly.

"She has gone," he replied.

"Where has she gone—and—with whom?"

"She has gone," he repeated.

"And Martin?"

"He went away somewhere. I do not know where."

"And Jose?"

"He's gone."

"They have all gone, then, it seems, but you, Pedro," I replied, half choking.

"But you will find them, señor," he said.

"I do not know," I replied. "I have been unfortunate. Things look dark, very dark to me, Pedro."

I did not realize at the time how much I was confiding in this menial servant of mine—this peon. I trusted him. He was human. I could talk with him. He knew something of my plans. And who else was there whom I could trust?

"You have not told me, Pedro, why you came back to the city," I said, after a little.

"I came to find you, señor," he replied. "I have a letter for you."

"For me?" I gasped.

"Yes, señor. It was sent to the hotel, and there was no one else to bring it but me."

"Where is it—let me see it?" I cried.

He produced the letter, crumpled and dirty, but there was no light to read it by, and I had not even a match.

We walked on for some distance. I was unfamiliar with the streets where we were, but I made no inquiries as to where he was going. I was willing enough to leave that to him. At last we went into a small shop, passed through to a court in the rear, and after following a dark passage for some distance he led me up a flight of stone steps to an upper room of one of the buildings.

"We are safe here," he explained. "The people are my friends."

It was dark in the room, and I stood in the middle of the floor and waited some time until he could find and light a candle.

The moment the candle was brought, I tore open the envelope Pedro had given me. I had supposed the letter to be from Martin, but in an instant I saw by the feeble and cramped handwriting that the letter was not from him. It was as follows:

I have been taken by bandits, and am held for ransom. Secure money, two thousand pestas, from Messrs. Smith & Rivera, and arrange terms. Some one will meet you at Texcoco.

PHILIP MELROSE.

Over and over again I read the note, and scanned closely the bit of paper it was written on. There was nothing mysterious about it. It was a plain statement of facts, and the situation one in which any well to do man might find himself. I only wondered how he was captured. Where was he at the time, and where was he going? It was natural that he should appeal to me for assistance, but how did he know where to find me?

"Where did you get this note?" I asked Pedro.

"It was given to me by a man—he knew me. He came to La Puebla to find you, but you had gone."

"What else do you know about it? Who was the man who brought it, and what did he say?"

"Nothing, señor. I did not know him—he knew me."

It was plain to me that the first thing for me to do was to attempt to rescue a Philip Melrose, or effect his release in some way. I could go to Texcoco, but

if I entered into negotiations with the bandits, I would eventually have to secure the money for the ransom. This would necessitate calling upon Messrs. Smith & Rivera. I would be obliged, too, to communicate my information to Mr. Smith.

I could not do this. I distrusted Mr. Smith. I almost believed him to be in collusion with the bandits themselves, or at least with the police officials; and likely as not in effecting Mr. Melrose's release I would let him fall into the hands of others who were almost, if not quite as much to be feared as the bandits.

The alternative left to me was that I might attempt to rescue Mr. Melrose single handed. This would certainly be a fool's errand, but I was in that mood, or frame of mind, which borders on desperation.

CHAPTER XVI.—A FOOL'S ERRAND.

IN the excitement and mental strain under which I had been laboring, I had almost forgotten that I had eaten nothing that day. But a healthy body demands sustenance, and makes its wants known sooner or later.

I did ample justice to the *frijoles* and *tortillas* which Pedro procured from the woman of the house. I was also enabled to discard my disguise; and it was a relief when the robe I had been wearing was out of my sight.

We slept that night where we were, and the next morning made preparations for leaving the capital. I was in need of a horse, and spent an hour bartering with the traders, at last purchasing a somewhat inferior animal, for which I paid sixty pesetas. I was not long in discovering, after I had obtained possession of the animal, that I had rather the worst end of the bargain.

I also purchased muzzle loading revolvers, the best that I was able to obtain, and some other necessary equipments. So far did I run in on my five hundred pesetas, that I had a mind to brave again the senior member of the firm of Smith & Rivera; but the fear of falling into some trap, and again finding myself under arrest, deterred me from having anything more to do with Mr. Smith than was absolutely necessary.

It was still early in the day when we departed, for all we had spent considerable time getting started. There was unusual activity in the city, as well as travel on the roads, on account of the Vera Cruz expedition.

A company of soldiers guarding a mule train bringing in supplies for the army was entering the city as we left and soon afterward we met a party of cavalry with camp followers in the rear. One of the very last of the stragglers was a Mexican mounted upon the horse which had been taken from me at Chapultepec.

As well as I knew my own horse I looked twice before I could believe I had not been mistaken. He was not a particularly valuable animal, but I had ridden him all the way from El Paso; besides being somewhat attached to him, he was a better horse than the one I had purchased. I was not willing, either, to see him remain in the hands of a stranger without making an attempt to recover him. As I could not forcibly take the horse, I stopped the fellow and bantered him for a trade.

At first I offered to trade even. He wanted seventy five pesetas to boot. I laughed at him, declaring that my horse was as good as his, and I had paid only sixty for him that morning.

"My horse is the largest," he maintained. "He will weigh a hundred pounds more than yours."

"He is too fat," I argued. "Now look at the frames of the two horses, one standing by the other. Mine has the bone. Yours has a little more flesh. My horse will endure most."

"Not so, señor," he replied. "My horse is the best animal. And, besides, your horse is old—he is worn out. Look at his teeth."

We had both dismounted, and now the horse I had so recently bought was forced to submit to an examination of his mouth.

"The horse is five years old," I declared, though the man I had bought him of had maintained that he was only four years old.

"Five, señor," he replied with a grin. "Five and five more. The horse is ten years old. See how his teeth are worn down. You see the flat shape of his nippers?"

I admitted that the horse's teeth showed wear, but argued that it was on account of the coarse fare he had had, not age, and that he was not more than five, or a few months over. But finally, to settle the vexed question and to get near a trade, I admitted that the horse possibly might be seven.

"But his legs, señor," he said, "this right knee is sprained, and he has a spavin on that left hind leg."

I denied the spavin; but after careful examination of the hock joint, and a warm dispute about there being an enlargement of the bone, we agreed on the compromise that the horse did not have a spavin, but might some time.

Next the Mexican listened to his breathing, and placed his ear at his windpipe, and shook his head with all the seriousness and dignity of an expert on pulmonary diseases who had just made a careful diagnosis.

"The horse has heaves," he said, looking very grave.

"Heaves," I cried. "Nothing of the kind. The horse has heaves no more than you have heaves. Why, man, you know nothing about a horse, to talk about heaves. Any boy that ever saw a horse could tell that horse's wind is all right. Get on him, and ride him up the road and back."

He did as I directed, putting spurs to the animal. But when he had dismounted he said nothing about the horse having the heaves.

"His back is sore," he said. "See how he cringes when you go to mount."

"It is not his back, but your spurs that he is afraid of," I replied.

Without arguing the question I pulled off the saddle and showed him that the horse was not galled.

"He will not stand under fire," objected the fellow. "He would never do for a cavalry horse."

"Will he not?" I said, drawing a revolver, and deciding to risk the experiment I fired two shots over the animal's head. He did not flinch.

He now turned to the other horse—my own—extolling at length his good qualities.

"You do not know this horse," he said. (In truth, I knew more about the horse than he did.) "I rode him in the battles of Las Vacas and at San Louis Potosi. He behaved well, señor. You should have seen him. I may say I owe my life to having so good a horse; and for the memory of the service he did me, bringing me safely through the engagements, I would not wish to part with him."

"Come," I replied, "that horse never was in a battle, nor do I believe you ever were. You stole him from some hacienda, I'd sooner believe, and for the fear of getting myself into trouble I do not mind whether or not I trade with you."

I turned as if to ride away, but he called me back and went into a long account of the horse's pedigree, and of how he obtained possession of him, having bought him, when a colt, of a friend. I became greatly interested, as well as amused, at the account he gave me, and the love he had for an animal which he could not possibly have had possession of more than a few hours.

Had I possessed plenty of money, I do not know but that I would have given him the seventy five pesetas, the difference he set in value between the two horses. He held out for his price, and I scorned to consider it. Then he came down ten pesetas, and finally to sixty, and then fifty. He stood out for fifty, and I rode away. He called after me, and I waited. I held out, and would offer him only ten pesetas. He agreed to take forty. We were beginning to get a little nearer together. I feigned not to care to trade, maintaining that I was afraid that he had not the right to sell the horse; but, in a most sincere way he protested that the horse was his, and that he had owned him since he was a colt, even telling me from whom he had purchased him. He could lie with the most natural ease and readiness; he could not have done better had he rehearsed his little story beforehand.

But I still stood firm. At last, with many expressions of regret at parting with the horse, asserting that it was only because he was in need of money that he could be induced to do so, he offered to accept thirty pesetas and take my horse, which, he said, might be made to do him. I stood for twenty pesetas. He would not take it. I rode away, and again he called after me. Finally the trade was made at twenty five, and the horse I had purchased that morning I exchanged for my own horse.

"Why did not señor take the horse? It was yours," asked Pedro, as we rode away.

"I know it was mine, but I did not want trouble with the fellow," I replied.

"But he had no right to the horse, and you gave him your horse and twenty five pesetas besides."

"Yes, and I would have given him fifty but what I would have had this horse. Not that the horse is worth it, but I have become attached to the animal. He has carried me safely through all danger so far, and I was not going to see that fellow have him."

Pedro smiled a broad smile, and what may have been his good opinion regarding my courage and ability, I think he had a poor estimation of my qualities as a horse trader.

We reached Texcoco during the middle of the day. Here it was that one of the bandits was to meet me, or such person as might represent Mr. Melrose. As to how they would be able to identify me, or one of their number make himself known to me, I had not been informed. I asked Pedro, and he said that the bandits knew every one. I was disposed not to believe this.

But, as I have said, I did not intend to negotiate with the bandits for Mr. Melrose's release. I was determined to make the attempt to secure my patron's freedom without paying the ransom. But so hazardous, so improbable of success, so bold a venture, did this undertaking seem, that I had thought it advisable not even to communicate my plans to Pedro, lest he dissuade me from attempting it.

The country beyond us, as I knew, was extremely rough, and in some places there were narrow mountain passes which could easily be held by one or two men against a considerable force of soldiers. It was a favorite place of retreat for the bandits, though their operations were usually carried on upon the main traveled roads. What few people there were scattered through the country were all friendly to them. Even the muleteers and stage drivers, when they knew them, would never give information against them.

It was not to be wondered at, either, that the people were friendly to them, when they were isolated, as they were, from the city and without any protection of the government. They were but following the natural law of self preservation; they feared the bandits and so made friends with them, and were befriended in return.

By some little conniving Pedro succeeded in learning that the headquarters of the bandit chief, Roberto Montalveo, were in the mountains north of the village, and obtained, also, fairly definite directions as how to find him, although he was advised at the same time that people did not go to find the bandits, and if they did it would be better if they did not do so.

After gaining all the information I could, I told Pedro that he might go on alone to La Puebla. He looked at me in surprise, as if I had dismissed him from my service. But when he found that I proposed to find the chief, rather than wait for him to send a messenger to me, he begged and pleaded with me not to go.

"Señor Harvey, you not go," he said. "They kill you. You find their hiding place, and they be afraid to let you live."

I finally succeeded in convincing him that it was the only thing that I could do, arguing that they would not kill me, as it was only money they wanted, and they could not secure that if I were dead. He shook his head sadly as he left me, and went on his way, probably thinking that he would never see me again.

There were, I knew, secret paths over the mountains; but the trail I followed led up the canyon between high precipices, and became rougher and more precipitous as I went on, sometimes passing along a narrow ledge, and then again up the steep, slippery side of the mountain. The country was wild and unsettled—not a house was to be seen. Deep gorges cut through the mountain, and although the scenery was at some places grand, I felt no appreciation of its beauty, no desire to remain within its oppressive solitude.

It was in just such a place that a guerrilla band would be likely to take refuge. Every foot of the way, almost, was a natural fortress, capable of being held against any attacking force. The ascent of the trail was necessarily made slowly and laboriously, and in many places the protruding walls of the canyon would have admitted but one horse to pass at a time.

About dusk I came to a hovel, built of stone, on the side of the mountain. As it appeared to be inhabited, I rode up to the door and called to the inmates. A Mexican woman, barefooted, and clad in a dirty gown, came to the door, followed by a man no less untidy in appearance.

They stared at me as if they had never seen a stranger before; and, in truth, it was very probable that no stranger, unless he was a bandit, had ever before come there voluntarily. Certainly no one had ever ventured there with the object I had in view.

I had been told that the bandit chief's headquarters were at a stone house, and naturally supposed this to be the house.

"Night has overtaken me," I said, "and I would like to find lodgings. I will be unable, as you can see, to go much further tonight."

"Si, señor; you come to a poor place," drawled the Mexican. "Where are you going?"

I hesitated, looked about me, and then mumbled something about it being better for me to leave the national road, intimating that I had escaped the authorities—which was true enough—and was wanted for being a rebel.

"You are not the first person who has found a retreat in these mountains," replied the man.

He came out of the house, examined my horse and equipments, and seemed to size me up generally.

"Revolutions," I said, "have been so frequent, rebellions so common, and political preferences of so doubtful a nature, that often a man who one day is high in authority is the next day a fugitive."

"You are a stranger?" he inquired abruptly.

"A stranger I come to your door."

"I mean a stranger to these parts," he said. "You would not come here otherwise."

"No, or I would not have let night overtake me in this out of the way place," I answered.

Even for the maliciousness of his eyes, and the ugly look he had given me, I thought that he could not be without some sense of human feeling for a stranger. But I believe, however, that even had I come there as a fugitive, I would have but ran from one danger to meet another, for men of his character are avaricious and selfish, and any unfortunate individual who falls into their hands is a fit subject for plunder.

"It is not much I can do for you," he said finally.

"But you will accommodate me with such as you have?" I asked.

"No, señor; I've no room," he replied, shaking his head. "You no stay with me—house above—you go there. They sometimes have room—may keep you."

He pointed up the trail, and I saw as he did so his mouth twitch a little.

Had I been running from danger I should have taken this as a warning and kept clear of the house he mentioned.

"How far have I to go?" I asked.

"It is right ahead—round the turn," he replied.

Acting upon his suggestion I bid him good day and followed the trail as he had directed. I knew now that I had about come to my journey's end. The house he had reference to was without doubt the rendezvous of the bandit chief, Montalveo. My feeling of satisfaction at having found the place outweighed all fears I might have had. I did not once think but that I would be able to take care of myself, come what might.

I found the house, as the Mexican said I would. It was a low stone building, with three rooms built side by side, and stood under the shelter of a high precipice, while in front the ground fell away gradually. It was so constructed that it could be made a strong place of defense, as the small windows in the front of the house had a wide sweep of the pass; and its location had probably been selected with this object in view.

Two lazy looking fellows, sitting in front of the door, made a grab for their guns as I approached; but seeing that I was alone, quickly regained their composure. I told my story, and asked them if I might stay there for the night.

"We will see if we can accommodate you," said one of them.

"I cannot go on," I replied. "Let me have a little straw in the stable. The night is cold, or I would not mind lying outside. And, as you can see, my horse is spent."

"It's a hard country on a horse," observed the other man.

"It's a hard country for any one," remarked the other fellow. "Not safe after nightfall—nor safe any time for strangers. Too many turned guerrillas."

"The country is all unsafe for me," I replied.

"Maybe, señor, but the government never sends any troops here," he answered, with a broad smile.

"Where are you going?" asked the other fellow.

"I expect to get to Vera Cruz some time," I said.

"Not a good place to go to," he replied. "They have the *vomito* there."

I dismounted, and as if I meant to stay there, whether they wanted me to or not, followed them into the house.

"I will pay you," I said, drawing my purse, and letting them see that it contained only a few reals, and a few other coins.

After some fumbling among small change, I handed one of the men four reals. He took the money, and said that he would do what he could for me, in the mean time questioning me further as to who I was, and how I came there. I held to the story that I was a fugitive; and they finally accepted the statement, or at least enough of it to believe that I had some reason for wishing to conceal my identity.

My horse was led to a rude affair used as a stable. I went to see that he was well cared for. When we returned to the house there was a third man there, a lean visaged fellow, who kept his serape wrapped closely about him.

He looked up, but on the whole regarded my presence with a silent indifference which might have been taken for contempt. The Mexican who came in with me introduced me, inquiring my name.

"Foster," I answered, giving my mother's name. It was also a part of my own, but I seldom wrote it.

They all went out of the house after a while and I could hear them talking together. It would appear, from a word or two I caught now and then, that most of the band was away, but that they would return before long.

When I first came to the place, I looked eagerly for some evidence of Mr. Melrose. It was possible that he was in the further room of the house. The first room, which was open on the front, was used as a stable, and the middle room was the living room. But, after listening, I could hear no sound, and concluded that he was not there.

"Señor goes tomorrow?" asked one of the men, when they had returned.

"Yes," I replied, but with a feeling that there was much uncertainty about my going tomorrow or any other day.

"That is," replied the fellow, "provided you have life and freedom."

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"Señor has committed some crime. No doubt a reward is offered for his arrest. The officers may be after him, and we may be forced to give him up," replied the man deliberately, watching me intently.

This was a contingency I had not considered, but I put on a bold front.

"Want me!" I said with a laugh. "There is no reward. Do not deceive yourself as to that."

It had been plain to me, if there was anything to be gained by it, I was to be delivered to the officers and the reward claimed. I should have expected as much. There might be honor among thieves, but no mercy for one who fell into the hands of these men.

They let the matter pass, and made an outward show of hospitality. A fire had been built in one corner of the room, supper prepared, and I was invited to eat with them. After supper one of the men left, and pretty soon the other two went outside. They closed the door after them, but there was a small window in the front high up in the wall. I crept along until I reached the window, and then listened.

The men stood near the house, and though I could not hear all the conversation, I could make out that they were talking of the ransom of a prisoner whom they held. I could not tell who the man was, but naturally supposed it to be Mr. Melrose. Failing to catch all the conversation, I ventured to lift my head, but the light from the fire cast my shadow on the stone above. Quickly realizing the danger of being discovered listening, I darted back to my seat at the other end of the room, accidentally striking my boot against the table leg as I did so.

I was none too soon, for I had no more than regained my seat when the door was suddenly opened and the men entered; but I feigned to have been dozing, and started up, kicking the table leg again.

I realized all too well that I had taken my life in my hands when I started out to find Mr. Melrose. If for nothing more, it was certainly worth while

to murder me for my horse and arms. But most of all I feared a knife thrust from behind, for the fellows were cowardly, and not disposed to risk being killed themselves in a fair encounter.

I sat against the wall, and continued pretending to doze in my chair. The men would say something occasionally, and then look at me. The fire burned low, and it was dark, and still those two cutthroats sat watching me. It was an uncomfortable position to be in, and I felt relieved when one of them got up and lit a candle.

"There will be some other men here later," he said. "Some of our friends are going to join the army."

"I hope that you will not mind my presence," I said.

"No, but we thought we would tell you."

He said no more, but produced a deck of cards, and invited me to join them; but I made an excuse that I was tired and did not care to play. I had taken an aversion to playing cards with Mexicans. They played by themselves, but I could see that the game lacked interest, and now and then they would listen as if expecting some one.

Finally I made an excuse to go outside. I went to the stable and saw that my horse was there. I looked about me, carefully inspecting the place as well as I could in the dark. It was very still. Not a sound broke the silence of the night; it seemed as if I could almost hear my heart beat.

When I returned to the room I noticed that the men had lain down their cards, and were engaged in a whispered consultation. I made some casual remark about it being late, and asked them where I could sleep for the night.

One of them took the candle and led the way to the adjoining room. It was a small room, fitted up with bunks against the walls. A stool and rude bench constituted all the other furniture.

"You can sleep here," he said. "There will be no one to occupy the room tonight but yourself."

"This will do very well," I replied.

"Are you a good sleeper?" he asked.

"Yes, sleep anywhere," I replied. "You need not mind about me until the sun warms things up."

"Señor may sleep as long as he wishes," he said. "We are going early, so if you hear us, you need not think it strange. We'll be back during the day," he explained, evidently referring to himself and his companions.

"I am glad you told me," I replied, as he went out. "I don't want to get out early. I've not had a good night's sleep for a week."

I sat down on one of the bunks, and heard him slip a pin in place to hold the door. Waiting until my eyes became somewhat accustomed to the darkness, I began an investigation to learn more of the character of the place I had been imprisoned in. The room had two small windows in front, but they were barred very much as prison windows are.

There was a door, too, but this was securely fastened, for I endeavored to force it, and was unable to do so. In one corner was a small hole in the roof, which had been left to serve as a chimney. Mexican houses do not generally contain fireplaces, or any means for heating the rooms, though fires are

built for cooking. This room had evidently been used at some time for a living room, though there was no sign of a fire having been recently built there.

I climbed to the windows, which were high in the wall, and examined the bars, but they were strong, and could not be moved. As for digging through the walls, that was impracticable. The chimney hole was not large enough to admit my body. Satisfying myself on this point I returned to my bunk and lay down to think over my situation.

I must have fallen asleep, for I was suddenly awakened by hearing horsemen outside. I sat up on my bunk and listened. There were three or four men in the party, and I heard them hitch their horses and come into the house. I could hear nothing they said.

Looking around I saw a face at the window of my room. There was a faint moonlight outside, and the face was distinctly outlined behind the bars of the window. I feigned to be asleep, breathing heavily, but all the time I was watching the face at the window, knowing very well that I could not be seen on account of the darkness of the room. When at last the man went away, I heard him go into the house.

Lying on my back I noticed a streak of light on the ceiling above my head, which came, as I perceived from the other room. I stood on my bunk and listened. I was able to distinguish the different voices of the men, and hear something of what was said.

They seemed to be talking about one of the men there. It was not Mr. Melrose, or I should have recognized his voice. I satisfied myself, too, that their chief was with them. In fact, I heard his name spoken.

I sat down to think. I was still entirely ignorant as to where Mr. Melrose was, or what had become of him. I had expected to find him, but instead I had only so far succeeded in getting myself locked behind bolted doors and barred windows. I was in despair, then I was angry with myself. As a last resort I decided on a move so bold that the mere thought of it seemed for the moment to make my hair rise and set my heart to beating hard and fast.

But the first thing for me to do was to escape from my prison.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

IN DAYS OF GALLANTRY.

"I've freshly gathered apples red,
Like morning dew that shine;
I've peaches ripe," the maiden said,
"And clusters from the vine."

The gallant courtier made reply,
"Thy eyes the dews outshine;
Fair maid, no peach's bloom can vie
With those soft cheeks of thine!"

A CLEVER SCOUNDREL AND HIS MATE.

BY HARRY MAYO PECK.

Being an account of the Moynihan-Walker episode—The aftermath of a bold burglary which threatened to wreck the reputation of an ambitious member of the police department.

"DAN" MOYNIHAN was a clever scoundrel. Everybody admitted it, from the old Cherry Street neighbors, who remembered—and not with pleasure—his boyish depredations, to genial Frank Walker, who, after four years' faithful service at police duty, had been promoted by the decease of old Ned Tyler to the captaincy of Station 4.

Captain Walker was young, in fact only thirty, and perhaps that was the reason he took it so hard.

It was tough, though, that two mornings after his appointment he should wake to find that the biggest burglary in ten years' history of the Police Department had been committed the night before.

And the worst of it was, it had occurred in his own district, and in a section patrolled by one of his best officers.

For on the cashier's desk of the Forbes National Bank, on that bright October morning, when the office boy opened the great doors, lay a brand new kit of burglars' tools and a bit of pasteboard. And the pasteboard wasn't soiled, either, as might have been expected.

It was of the conventional size, and on it, in the daintiest of engraving, was the following:

"Mr. Daniel Perry Moynihan."

And beneath it, in clear, clean chirography,

"To the new captain of Station 4, with compliments."

It was a challenge.

Captain Walker recognized the fact, and so did his brother officers, who were older than he, but who had not got the office.

And they said nothing, except that burglaries were common things, and experience was inestimable.

It looked as though the young captain had encountered the biggest job of his life, and that, too, with the eyes of the entire department, and the attention of the municipal authorities particularly, upon him.

Alone in his room, with only his pipe and "Dick," the police dog—who seemed to have taken a great fancy to him—for company, the new chief thought over the matter. He thought a long time, and at last had an idea.

"Bravo, Dick, old boy!" he exclaimed, "we'll beat them yet." And "Dick," in the usual fashion, with many thumpings, attested his approval at the vigorous action of the new head.

But whether Captain Walker meant the criminals, or the blue coated wise-acres around him, or both, is uncertain from his remark.

Any way he gave orders to the sergeant that when Officer Lynch—on whose beat was the Forbes National Bank—came in he wished to see him.

* * * * *

It was eleven o'clock, and to the members of the Recreation Club, down in Thatcher Street the "edge of the evening" was just on.

A stranger looking in on them in their cozy clubhouse would scarcely have suspected the character of the members. Yet it was a fact that here, in the heart of the city, in the very middle of District 8, were the headquarters of ten of the cleverest and most ingenious scoundrels that ever cracked a safe, or appeared in evening dress, as the occasion and policy might seem to warrant.

And Mr. Daniel Perry Moynihan, well educated, clever, and rascally, was president of the club.

Theirs was a sumptuously furnished retreat. The members, from the character of their "occupation," received high wages, and could afford to be lavish. And Moynihan would have only the best.

Several well executed etchings adorned the walls, a few paintings, and here and there, at random and in odd corners, as if somewhat ashamed of themselves, pictures representing sporting men and events.

A bright fire crackled between the andirons; glimpses of a pool table might be seen in an adjoining room, and still farther back, a shining bar, with its glittering paraphernalia, presided over by a young symphony in black, whose perennial smile and obsequious "Yes, sahs," had been of great monetary assistance to him. For his customers were paying ones, and policy is instinctive.

Everything was just what might be found in any well ordered club, and yet, on account of its clever arrangement in the center of a block (owned by a discerning but politic landlord) the police of Division 8 were totally unaware of its existence.

A group of well dressed men stood about the fireplace, for the evening was cool. Among them was Moynihan, in evening dress, just drawing on his overcoat.

"Ah, Dan! but you're a changeable boy," said one of them.

"How's that?"

"Thursday night a burglar's sneaks and dark lantern, and tonight evening dress and diamonds."

"Well, you fellows ought not to kick; you get your share, you know," Moynihan answered, laughingly.

"That's right," and a cheery "good night" followed the genial chief as he left the room.

Moynihan, after a somewhat circuitous route, reached the street. Cautiously he looked out. The coast was clear, and he stepped down into a dark alley.

As he reached the pavement he almost fell over a man seated on the curb with a forlorn looking bulldog beside him.

He was shabbily dressed, and the genus seemed very apparent.

"Hello, tramp."

"Well, what if I am; there's no use rubbing it into a man."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing I know of."

"What are you sitting here for?"

"I want to."

"Are you drunk?"

"Maybe."

"Well, get up, and come have another drink with me."

"I'm no Oliver Twist!"

"What do you mean?"

"I didn't ask for more! that's what I mean. Do you want a diagram?"

And Moynihan, realizing it was one on him, went up to the apparently besotted individual and made a closer inspection.

"Just as I thought; a dirty tramp and a dirtier bulldog," he said to himself.

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes!"

The metamorphosed burglar was silent for a moment. "Guess I'll risk it," he muttered below his breath.

"Say Tra——, I mean, pard! You come with me and I'll find you something to eat."

In five minutes the dress suit, the dirty tramp, and the sorry bulldog were in the parlor of the Recreation Club.

There was an ominous silence for a moment when they entered, but Moynihan remarked; "it's all right, boys, an old friend of mine in straitened circumstances."

And the seedy tramp nodded emphatically, and doffed his disreputable old hat. The sad eyed bulldog curled up on a rug before the fire.

"Come with me," said the chief, and the pair passed through a doorway into a cozy diningroom. The eating room was unoccupied save for a waiter, and they took seats at one of the little tables.

The waiter came forward.

"In a few minutes, John," said Moynihan; "come when I ring."

A moment later they were alone in the room.

Then the chief leaned back in his chair, looked at the tramp, and quietly said: "Got my card, Walker, I see."

The tramp gave a visible start.

"It's no use, Walker; I knew you the minute I fell over you on the curbstone. I've had so much to do with your profession, that when the danger infection is around I'm always one of the first to catch it. Had it rubbed into me by friction tonight," he added.

Neither said anything for several minutes. Then Walker stretched out a hand from the dirty sleeve, which was grasped by the chief. "You're clever."

"Thanks!" said the chief, and he pressed a button.

"Manhattans!" and the boy disappeared.

"Well, what are you going to do, now you have me?" queried Walker.

"Get you a good dinner, as I promised you, convince you that a new police chief is not the mental equal of a rogue as long in the business as myself, and then if you choose to give me your word as a gentleman, that you will never

mention this place or occurrence, or interfere in the least with my future plans, let you go."

"And as near as my inferior order of intelligence can make it out, I get a dinner, a reduction to the ranks, and a chance to perjure myself as soon as I get out of here."

"Your hypothesis is absolutely correct. You are arguing on two certainties and one chance; the last of which you will not take, as you are a man of honor."

"But supposing I refuse to comply with your request?"

"Then the newspapers will print scare heads and the public will have the pleasure—pardon me—the opportunity, of seeing how the mighty press rewards faithful servants after death."

"A bit cold blooded, isn't it?"

"Yes, a trifle; but with a man in my position, liberty and life are about on a par, and it wouldn't do to get caught, you know. But here come the oysters; we can continue this later."

At this minute Dick, having missed his master, poked his head in at the door, and walking over to the table threw himself down with a sigh.

"Nice dog, that!" said the chief.

"Yes! he's a good one," was the reply.

The dinner progressed, and, after an hour spent most socially, with no talk of "shop," came to a conclusion. The two adjourned to the parlor, which was now empty, the coffee was brought in, and the cigars lighted.

Dick got up, stretched himself, and followed them; after sniffing about the furniture he strolled out of an open door into the kitchen.

"Inquisitive?" queried Moynihan.

"Hungry, I guess," replied the guest.

"Walker, let me say you did remarkably well in tracing me here. What made you think of this locality as a probable stamping ground?"

"If you examine the city records for a year or two, you will find that during that time District 8 has been absolutely free from burglarious disturbances of that high toned character which has come to be your distinguishing mark."

"Thanks! I will make a note of it. The sin of omission is a grave one."

"Yes! it is a leading one."

Then for a few minutes there was silence. Tobacco had wrought its magic spell, and each was absorbed in his own thoughts.

Then Moynihan roused himself, tossed the cigar stump into the smoldering fire, and turned to the new captain. "Well, Walker, having reversed the order of the conventional sequence by having our pleasure first, it's now time for business. What do you propose to do in the matter?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"How long do you intend to take before doing it?" sneered Moynihan.

"Let Dick in before he scratches the paint all off that door, and I will see if some satisfactory conclusion cannot be reached."

The chief hastily rose and walked over to the entrance door, to the other side of which, by the scratching, Dick had somehow apparently wandered.

He opened it and then staggered back into the room.

Dick marched in. Close behind him came Officer Lynch with four stalwart policemen.

Then Walker slowly rose from his chair. "As I said, Moynihan, I thought some conclusion might be reached when Dick was admitted."

He drew out his card case, abstracted a card, and having scribbled on it "with compliments," handed it to the chief. Then he turned to his men: "Officer Lynch, arrest that man."

There was no resistance.

After the handcuffs were on, the ex chieftain turned to Walker and said: "Cap, there's just one question I want to ask you."

"Go ahead."

"How long has that dog been in the business?"

"Nine years."

"Thanks."

And the police dog looked up from the rug before the fire with an I've-been-there-before expression, but he said nothing.

"IF."

If trouble were a feather
A breath might blow away,
And only sunny weather
Came to us, day by day,
We'd laugh away the wrinkles
That tell of life's decay,
If trouble were a feather
A breath might blow away.

If maids would set the fashion
Never to answer "nay,"
When love, the tender passion,
Spoke in its pleading way;
Then through life's leafy byways
In lovers' mood we'd stray,
If maids would set the fashion
Never to answer "nay."

If fame were worth the striving
And all were in the race,
And each of us were driving
A horse well backed for place;
Then round life's race course speeding
We'd set a merry pace,
If fame were worth the striving
And all were in the race.

James King Duffy.

THE HERMIT'S SECRET.*

BY OLIVER OPTIC.

A story of the Northwest, in which a strange hero figures—Why Paul Gayland left a comfortable home and a doting foster father—His experiences as master of a steam yacht and the strange consequences of a tattooing.

CHAPTER XLV.—CAPTAIN GREENWAY IS UTTERLY CONFOUNDED.

CONNY FORBUSH was as much astonished to find that he had more names than he had supposed as the lady was to hear the real name of her *protégé*; but both of them were silent, waiting for Mr. Cavan to make further developments of his knowledge.

"You were informed that this boy was an orphan when he was in Dresden, where you assumed the care of him, and the statement is true now, as it was then," continued the agent, thoughtfully, and with the evident intention of not saying too much.

"You have brought him up so far, and have been very kind to him. Though he is an orphan, he is not a child of poverty, and all that you have expended upon him will be paid back to you."

"Paid back to me!" exclaimed Mrs. Forbush. "I would not take a penny for anything; and the only question that troubles me now is whether or not I am to lose him."

"The boy got wild and left me; but I have always believed he would come back to me, for he has often written to me for money, and I have sent him what he wanted. He said he should soon come home."

"He has come back to you," replied Cavan, looking sharply at the runaway, "and I trust he will remain with you for the present; if he does not he will make a bad mistake."

"Though I am not authorized to say anything about the matter, I think you may reasonably expect him to remain with you, for he will have no other home, unless one is made for him;" and the agent began to move towards the door.

"I have always done well by Conny, and I have become very much attached to him," added Mrs. Forbush.

"I should like to live with mother," said the young man, whom the sharp practice of the ex detective had plainly brought to his senses.

"Very well, madam; I shall leave Conny here. If he runs away again, or fails to behave himself like a gentleman, I desire you to inform me at once," continued the agent, as he handed her his business card.

* This story began in the July issue of THE ARGOSY. The seven back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 70 cents.

"But can you tell me where the other young man is that looks like Conny, Mr. Cavan?" asked the lady.

"That will have to remain an open question for the present, and I must take my leave of you now," replied the agent, as he left the room, followed by Conny.

"Am I to be arrested?" asked the returned runaway, as he closed the door behind him.

"For the present there is not the slightest danger of it; but if you leave Mrs. Forbush, or communicate with Roddy, you may be sure that you will share his fate," replied Cavan impressively.

"I will not leave her, and I will have nothing more to do with Roddy."

"If you do either, you may be sure that you will spend the next few years of your life in a prison," said the agent, as he hastened away, and Conny returned to his foster mother.

Cavan was in season for the next train, and returned to Excelsior after an absence of less than two hours, entirely satisfied with what he had done, and some time before the Hebe arrived with the passengers from the Hermitage.

He took a seat on the wharf, and began to examine some papers he took from his pocket, on which he had doubtless made memoranda relating to the business in which he was at present engaged; but in due time he discovered the Hebe approaching the town.

"You will be ready to take us back as soon as we can find the young man who is to spend a week or so with us, will you?" asked Roddy, as he and Gay came out of the cabin.

"We won't keep you waiting a minute; and the sooner you are ready the better we shall like it," replied Bashy, to whom the question had been addressed.

"We shall not remain long, for if we don't find our friend, we shall not wait for him," said Roddy, as he and his companion walked up the wharf.

Cavan kept out of sight till the happy pair had left the wharf, and then he went on board to hear the report of Captain Greenway in regard to his trip up the lake, and to the Hotel Lafayette; and Phil did not fail to describe the changes in the complexion of Mrs. Goldson and her brother when they recognized Mr. Westlawn.

But Cavan was still reticent, though he had spoken in the parlor of Mrs. Forbush to some purpose; yet he said not a word about what he had done during the absence of the Hebe, to the captain, who looked so much like Conrad Goldson; and the latter had no suspicion of what was coming in the near future.

Roddy and Gay were not absent more than a half hour, for they could not find Chick Gillpool at any of the hotels, or anywhere about the town, for the very good reason that he was not there, as he had promised to be, though they took a look at the bank as they passed.

"You will find me at the Hotel Lafayette when you come down from the Hermitage," said Cavan, as he beat a hasty retreat on the approach of Roddy and Gay. "I am going on the St. Louis, which is now at the wharf."

"She goes to the Hotel St. Louis on her way up the lake, and I shall be at

the Lafayette almost as soon as you are," added Captain Greenway, as he returned to the pilot house.

Roddy demonstrated the fact that he was in the habit of using profane language when he came on board of the Hebe; and he did not hesitate to apply some of it to the friend who had not kept his promise, in the presence of Bashy.

The happy pair went into the after cabin again as soon as they came on board, and the engineer cast off the fasts when the pilot whistled for him to do so, and the steamer went off on her trip.

Bashy knew now that he had a competent pilot at the wheel, and he did not spare the coal, so that the Hebe made one of her shortest passages to the head of the lake, and the passengers were landed in the boat without any incident worthy of note.

The Hebe started on her return trip without any delay; but off Enchanted Island the colored pilot rang to stop her, and left the wheel, hastening to the forward cabin, where he procured a basin and some soap, and proceeded to wash the burnt cork from his face, with the assistance of the engineer.

"The fun is all over, is it?" asked Bashy.

"I don't know that there is anything more for us to do in this business; but I have no need to wear this dark face any longer, for no one will recognize me now," replied the captain. "Is it all off my face?"

"Every bit of it, and you look like a white man now," answered Bashy.

"Then I will put on my uniform again;" and in a few minutes more he came out of the fore cabin in his usual dress.

In a short time the Hebe was made fast to the wharf in front of the Hotel Lafayette, just after the St. Louis had made her landing, and Captain Greenway saw Cavan waiting for him.

They walked up to the hotel, where Cavan inquired for Mrs. Goldson, and they were shown up to her apartments, which appeared to be among the best in the house.

The agent knocked at the door, which was opened by Mr. Blonday, after considerable delay; and it was evident from the sounds that came from the room that a somewhat excited conversation had been going on.

"I wish to see Mr. Westlawn, who is here," said Cavan; and he could not help noticing that Mrs. Goldson's brother was not in good humor.

"Mr. Westlawn is engaged at present," replied Blonday, in curt tones, as he proceeded to close the door.

"Not so much engaged that I cannot see that gentleman," interposed the gentleman from Chicago, hastening to the door. "As Mr. Cavan, at the door, manages this matter for me, I shall ask to have him admitted, with Captain Greenway of the Hebe, who is also interested in the business before us."

"I object!" exclaimed Blonday, with the sinister expression on his face, which Phil had noticed, very much intensified.

"Then I will retire myself, and proceed in the manner already indicated," said Mr. Westlawn, in a tone which indicated firmness enough for a martyr in any cause.

"Don't be rash, Arnold," interposed Mrs. Goldson, who appeared to be in

a state of extreme agitation. "Let the gentleman and the captain of the Hebe come in, for we must settle this business in some way."

Captain Greenway wondered what possible interest he could have in the business, whatever it was, as Mr. Westlawn intimated; but Blonday stepped to one side at the words of his sister, and he followed Mr. Cavan into the parlor, where a storm was certainly in progress.

"Mrs. Goldson, let me introduce you to your step son," said Westlawn, leading the captain of the Hebe up to her. "This is Philip Goldson, one of the two own sons, twins, of your late husband."

Captain Greenway was utterly confounded.

CHAPTER XLVI.—THE HISTORY OF A DARK TRANSACTION.

A SARDONIC laugh burst from the lips of Arnold Blonday when he heard the introduction of the captain of the Hebe to his sister; but his face was red with excitement, and his lips quivered as he endeavored to present this appearance of mirth, and to turn the proceedings of Mr. Westlawn to ridicule.

Captain Greenway was astonished to find that he had another name, and "Philip Goldson" certainly corresponded to the initials on his arm, which had suggested both the one given him by Mr. Gayland and the one that he had chosen himself.

The announcement of the gentleman from Chicago settled it that Mr. Gayland was not his father by some secret marriage; and Mr. Cavan had been earlier informed of the fallacy of his suggestion to the captain.

"It is easy to say that this is the son of my husband by his first wife," said Mrs. Goldson, after a long pause to digest the extraordinary statement of Mr. Westlawn, and apparently to allow others to do so. "But it is quite another thing to prove it."

"Do not for a moment suppose that I make this claim without abundant means of proving all that I have said, and a great deal more," replied Mr. Westlawn, with the air of one who felt that he was master of the situation.

"That my husband left two children by his first wife, of course I shall not deny," added Mrs. Goldson, struggling to repress her violent emotion. "All the world knows that there were two children, and that they were twin boys."

"I certainly knew it, for they were the children of my only sister, and I felt as much interest in them as if they were my own," said Mr. Westlawn, manifesting almost as much feeling of a different kind.

"On her death she commended the little ones to my care, for she knew that her husband could not live many years, for even then the fatal malady had fastened itself upon him."

"Then you are my uncle, sir," interposed Philip Goldson, as we must now call the captain of the Hebe, since this appears to be his real name.

"I am your uncle; and you were old enough to call me 'Uncle David' before your mother died," replied the active man of the party, as he took his long lost nephew by the hand, and bestowed a look of affection upon him.

"I had no idea things were going to turn out in this way when you were called from your room at the Ryan this morning at one or two o'clock," said

Philip, hardly able to realize the strange situation in which he found himself placed.

"You are a brave young fellow, Captain Greenway, but you are allowing yourself to be imposed upon," interposed Arnold Blonday, with a sneer on his thin lips. "This story is all a fraud."

"If you desire it, Mrs. Goldson, I will give you the whole history of the case, indicating the evidence I shall bring to prove all that I assert."

"Don't hear it, Janet!" exclaimed her brother. "It is all a fiction and a fraud."

"But it will do no harm to hear it, for it will amuse us for a time, if nothing more," replied the lady, struggling to wreath her face in smiles.

"It is a downright swindle, Janet!" added Arnold Blonday. "It is entirely transparent, too, as an effort to extort money from you. Westlawn, what is your share of the plunder to be?"

"I am not here to settle this matter; the courts will do that. Now, Mr. Blonday, if you utter another word like those you have just spoken, I will get out a warrant, and have both you and your sister arrested for conspiracy against these twin heirs of my brother in law before the sun goes down to-night," said Mr. Westlawn, calmly but firmly.

"I wish to hear the history of his operations, Arnold, and I must ask you not to interfere again," said the lady, with a look at her brother which he appeared to understand, for he retired to the farther corner of the room.

"I have no desire to force my story upon you, though I am absolutely sure that justice will be done to my twin nephews in the end," said Westlawn.

"Proceed, if you please, sir," said the lady with a show of dignity.

"Let me say in the beginning that Conboie is in New York, ready to swear to the facts I shall give in relation to the residence of the boys in Paris," continued the uncle of the twins.

At the mention of this name Arnold Blonday sprang out of his chair, and looked like a maniac as he glanced at the speaker; but he recovered himself and resumed his seat.

"I have no doubt that Mrs. Londyke Forbush and her companion, Joanna Barlow, as well as Mr. Ward Gayland and his wife, of St. Paul, can identify Conboie as the man who brought the children to them, one in Dresden and the other in Nice," the uncle proceeded, consulting a mass of papers in his hands, some of which had been handed to him by Cavan since he came into the parlor.

Mrs. Goldson dropped into a chair, and seemed to be oppressed for want of breath, so violent was the emotion she was trying to suppress.

"Take off your coat, if you please, Philip Goldson," continued the speaker; and he rolled up the shirt sleeve of his nephew when he had done so. "I knew that you, madam, and your brother were plotting against these children; how I knew it matters not now.

"When your child Sibyl was born, the twins were taken to my house for two months, to get them out of the way; and while they were there I had the initials of their names pricked into their right arms in India ink. It was a cruel operation, but it was necessary.

"They had entirely recovered from the wounds when you took them home. When the children were six years old, on the plea that your health did not permit you to take care of them, you sent them to Paris, though I protested against such a step.

"You argued that they would be well cared for in a private school, would be educated better than they could be in this country, and would be able to learn the French language better than in after years; and as you were the legal guardian of the little ones, you had your own way.

"About a year later, both of these children were stolen from the person in charge of them, and they have never been heard from since till today. The story was in the papers here and in Europe, and every effort was used to recover them, without success."

"Both my brother and myself were in New York at the time the children were abducted; but Arnold went to Paris, and did all he could to recover them. He advertised for them in England, France, and Vienna," said Mrs. Goldson.

"The advertisements were shown to me; but I believed there was treachery to the children. I had to leave New York and lost sight of the case, though I employed Mr. Cavan to look it up, and his report satisfied me for the time.

"I went to Chicago with my business; but I failed three years ago, and could do nothing more till twelve months ago, when I got on my feet again. Then the whole matter came to me with more force than ever, and I put the case into the hands of my younger brother, who has talent for such work.

"Frank began by shadowing, as Mr. Cavan calls it, your house, and through your man servant, got a sight at all the letters you and your brother mailed. Three were for Jules Conboie, of Paris, and his address was carefully noted.

"I sent Frank to Paris, where he had the skill to upset Conboie entirely by pretending to be your agent, and in the end he made a full confession that he had abducted the twins, to save himself from prison. Frank brought him to the United States, and he has him in New York where he can put his finger on him."

To this narrative Cavan added the history of the twins as he had learned it from Philip and from Mrs. Forbush.

Mrs. Goldson and her brother had to give it up; and the lady protested that she would not have done what she did if she had known that her husband's wealth was sufficient for the twins and her daughter Sibyl, for whose benefit the fraud had been committed.

Arnold Blonday wanted to "settle" the difficulty; but Uncle David would listen to nothing short of the entire restitution of the shares of the twins in the estate of their father, as shown by the inventory at the surrogate's office in New York.

The matter was arranged in this manner in the end.

CHAPTER XLVII.—THE LAST OF THE HERMIT OF MINNETONKA.

"OUR business seems to be finished, Mrs. Goldson," said David Westlawn, rising from his chair. "Of course I knew how it was coming out if we could

find the twins ; and as soon as I had a clew to them, thanks to my friend Cavan, I telegraphed to Frank to employ a lawyer to look after the property of their father. Your other step son is at the Lake Park Hotel, and you can see him if you are so disposed."

"I will call upon him soon," added the lady.

The visitors all left the room, and went on board of the Hebe, where Captain Philip Goldson's tongue ran at a very lively rate for some time. There was no longer anything to conceal, for everything was thoroughly ventilated, not including the operations and intentions of the happy pair at the Hermitage.

The uncle was greatly grieved when he learned that Conrad had been the associate of a professional burglar, and he was prepared to send him back to Paris rather than have him arrested, for it was plain enough that he had been led away by Roddy, though he had no right to allow himself to be enticed into evil ways.

The Hebe conveyed the two gentlemen who had accomplished such a revolution in the affairs of the captain and others to Excelsior, where they took the next train for St. Paul.

It was understood that nothing was to be said to Mr. Gayland, and especially not to his wife, till final action in the affairs of the happy pair had been taken.

When they had gone, the captain proceeded to relate to the engineer the astonishing story of the events of the day, which took him till bed time, including a visit to a hotel for supper.

"You are a big bug and a rich fellow now, and you will not want the Hebe long," said Bashy, laughing. "Just remember that I have made you an offer for her."

"Being a big bug and rich will not alter me in the least, Bashy," replied the captain, as they turned in. "I may not want the Hebe, and when I do not, she shall be yours."

The next morning the steamer went up to take a look at the Hermitage, after Philip had blacked his face again ; and the interesting couple there hinted that they should like to visit Excelsior again, to look for their expected friend ; and, of course, under the circumstances, the Hebe was at their disposal.

They did not find their friend, though they spent a good deal of time in the vicinity of the bank, according to Bashy, who kept watch of them ; but they returned disappointed, though it was difficult for Philip to understand why they were so anxious to have "Chick Gillpool" with them, unless he had been delegated to examine the bank building, as he had done.

The unhappy pair, as they now were, were landed ; and soon after dinner on board of the steamer, which had gone to her moorings, the two villains went off together, and as the Hebe went out of Cape Cod Bay, Philip discovered them in their boat, pulling across Halstead's Bay.

When the steamer came to the narrow neck of land which separates Halstead's Bay from the main body of the lake, the captain saw them through his after window, drawing their boat across the neck, and he concluded that they were going for the tools which had been hidden on some island.

Philip was afraid to excite their suspicions, and he kept the Hebe on her course till she had passed the Narrows, where he waited a couple of hours, and then returned to his moorings.

"I should like to know what those scamps are about," said Bashy.

"So should I," replied the captain.

"But I want to hear what they are talking about; and if you say the word, I will put myself under the bed in one of the chambers, where you did, for they are going to do something soon, or they would not want their tools."

"They haven't got back yet, and you may try it, if you like, but at your own risk," said Philip.

"They have not come back yet, and if you will put me ashore, I will take my chances."

Bashy was put ashore, and the captain returned to the steamer; but it was quite dark when the boat of the happy pair came to the inner landing on the little bay.

Nothing had been seen or heard of Bashy at nine o'clock the next morning, when the occupants of the shanty brought two valises and a bag to their boat, which the captain examined with his glass; and he was relieved of his anxiety for the safety of the engineer by their appearance.

The baggage was put into the boat, and the pair pulled out to the steamer, saying that they were going down to get some washing done, and for some things they needed, and would like to be carried down in the Hebe.

The colored pilot explained that the captain had gone over to the Chapman House, and he had a party to take from there at noon, so that the steamer could not be had.

They decided to go in their own boat, and as soon as they were out of sight, Philip went for Bashy, who had shown himself on the shore.

He had astounding news, for the burglars were to do their job that night; and all day long the steamer followed the boat that had left the Hermitage, but kept a mile or less away from her.

At the Lake Park he telegraphed to Mr. Cavan, and he found him and Mr. Westlawn at the wharf when the boat arrived; and at midnight, when Roddy had his tools at the door of the bank vault, and his work begun, he and Gay were suddenly nipped in the bud by the officers concealed under the counter.

An extensive and valuable kit of tools was secured, and the happy pair were taken to the county jail before morning; and the papers had a full account of the attempted robbery when people read them at breakfast time.

Mr. Cavan had arranged to have the affairs of the twins finally settled as soon as the nephew of Mr. Gayland had fully committed himself, and in the middle of the forenoon the capitalist and his wife arrived at Excelsior, where they were taken on board of the Hebe.

"Paul!" exclaimed Mr. Gayland, as soon as he saw him.

"Paul!" repeated his wife, when she looked at his full uniform.

"This young man, who is the captain of the Hebe, is Philip Goldson; and he has been in command of this steamer for the last month," said Cavan.

"Whoever he is, I am afraid he will soon have to leave his steamer," said the lady, who was not at all pleased to see him again.

"Why so?" asked Cavan, in his blandest tones.

"He will have to answer for the robbery of our house," replied Mrs. Gayland, with not a little malice in her tones and manner.

"We shall be able to prove that he was not there, though it will be shown that Sparks Gayland was there, and gave the information which led to the robbery," added the agent.

"Sparks engaged in a robbery! Don't tell me that!" exclaimed the lady.

"Not only in your house, but at the bank in this town," said Cavan, who really enjoyed the defeat of the lady. "Just now he is in jail on the latter charge, and is likely to spend some time in prison for it. The local officers here can tell you all about it."

"Can it be possible?" groaned the uncle of the guilty young man.

The steamer started up the lake, and on the passage to the Lafayette, where she was bound, Cavan told the whole story of the robbery, and the discovery of the parentage of the twins.

At the hotel they were met on the wharf by Conrad Goldson, and both the capitalist and his wife were willing to admit that it might have been he whom they had seen in the hall of the elegant mansion on the night of the robbery.

The party met in the parlor of Mrs. Goldson; but there was nothing new to be unfolded, though the strange history of the remarkable fortunes of the twins was the subject of the conversation till the middle of the afternoon.

For the first time, Captain Goldson saw his twin brother, and in half an hour they were as good friends as though they had never been separated, and Philip took his brother down to see the steamer.

On this occasion it was decided that Philip should return to Mr. Gayland's house, while Conrad should remain in Philadelphia with Mrs. Forbush, who was made happy by this decision.

Arnold Blonday had already departed for New York, with instructions to attend to the transfer of the property of the twins to David Westlawn and Ward Gayland, as their guardians and trustees, and Mrs. Goldson proved that she was a woman of the world by acting as though nothing derogatory to her character for honesty had transpired.

At the invitation of the captain the entire party embarked in the Hebe for the upper end of the lake, to see the Hermitage, which was duly inspected and the party went on board for the return.

"Bashy, I don't think I shall have any further use for the Hebe, and I accept your offer," said Captain Goldson, when they arrived at Excelsior, where the St. Paul party were to take the train. "I will give you a bill of sale when I come over in a day or two."

"All right, Captain Goldson. But she shall be at your service whenever you come over here, though I suppose you will want a steamer on White Bear Lake now," replied Bashy, as he grasped the hand of Philip.

That night Philip Goldson slept in his former chamber in the elegant mansion. Sparks Gayland was not in his, and the six thousand two hundred dollars was again in the safe in the library.

Mrs. Gayland mended her ways after her terrible defeat in sustaining her favorite, and as Philip did his best to conciliate her, they became passable

friends, for Sparks, sentenced to the State prison for a short term, while Roddy had a long one, was no longer in the house to make trouble between them.

Philip Goldson is happy in the improved relations of the elegant mansion on the hill, and Uncle David was a guest there for a week after the events narrated.

But the hero of the lake has still a lingering delight in cruising in the Hebe, now under the management of Captain Wingstone. Though he is not sorry that he is no longer called "The Hermit of Minnetonka."

THE END.

A SACRIFICE AND ITS SEQUEL.

BY EDWARD BUSHNELL.

The stress of mind caused in an escaped convict by the sight of an advertisement, that, as he read it, meant torture to him but comfort and happiness to one he loved.

THOMAS MARTIN laid the torn scrap of newspaper on the table, extinguished the fast waning candle with a pinch of his grimy thumb and finger, and went over to the little window which stared upon the street.

One hand was at his throat, and the other was outstretched against the window frame, as he let the outer air come into his nostrils. Presently he turned and went a few steps to where a curtain hung across a corner of the squalid room. He parted it gently and listened to the loud breathing of the child he could not see.

On the floor at his side was the bundle brought home that evening for her morrow's toil; behind him stood the low stand with the work basket, at which she sat sewing from morning till evening; and further back were shelves on which lay a few morsels for their breakfast.

And there in the darkness before him lay his little Carrie, the only soul on earth that had a tender thought for him; and he, big, strapping Thomas Martin, could not put a roof above her head nor nourishment in her body, but she must work her little fingers till they bled.

He bowed his head, and the light came into his eyes for a moment as he hearkened. Then his face writhed and changed again, and he strode about the room with twitching mouth and clenched hands, lashed by memory.

At first his musings were of crimes, but this he did not long tarry over. A few pockets picked, two or three men held up at the pistol's point, the clever manipulation of gambling tools, a half dozen burglaries—the last ending in murder—he had no remorse for these; they scarcely interested him now.

Crime had been his trade, and with such deeds he had bought life's comforts for his wife and child.

Then there came before him the kaleidoscope of his arrest and trial; the testimony of things he had thought deep hidden; the ripening conviction in the faces of the jurors; the awkward earnestness of the young attorney whom the county paid for defending him, who seemed really to believe the lies of which his defense was woven.

He thought of the awful suspense while the jury deliberated, and he

wondered whether their verdict would mean death or freedom to him; and the final crushing of his soul when the verdict of murder in the second degree was read and he came to realize that he should pass not through the gateway of death into a future, unknown and so not void of hope, but past lintels of stone, into inevitable Gehenna.

The moonlight flickered through the window and fell across the scrap of paper under his eyes; it mingled with the dark shadows on the floor and seemed to make the walls advance upon him and cramp him like a cell—like the solitary dungeon in which many a doomed day had lagged upon him.

In his soul each line of the awful nightmare of his prison life stood forth clear and terrible. The long procession with striped suits and shaven heads stalked in lockstep before him; the clammy odor of prison fare choked him and mocked his hunger; he shuddered at the unceasing routine of work and sleep, work and sleep, with no respite.

Then there came that culmination of horror when the State of Ohio had no work for its prisoners, and he sat with idle body and brain afire, thinking, thinking, thinking, till each thought was like a molten drop, writhing and hissing through his throbbing temples; waiting through the age long day for the more terrible monotony of the morrow; longing, begging, weeping—yes, even praying, for work—for anything that the hands might do to give the brain respite from the eternity of minutes.

And even yet, that very day, though free and at home, he had been begging for work. He thought he had asked at a hundred shops.

He had walked miles for work since the strikers had driven him from his job; for he knew that Carrie, Carrie, but fourteen and so thin, was in the hot room sewing, the long day through, and if he did not find work, he, burly Thomas Martin, must eat up half of his child's earnings or starve.

He had stolen once or twice, but dared not more; for stealing opened up the vista of arrest, recognition, return whence he had escaped—hell.

His eyes fell again upon the newspaper clipping, and again he dumbly picked it up and read, more from memory than from the moonlit scrap:

Notice—To the heirs of George B. Reese, late of Trenton, New Jersey: The said Reese having died intestate, his heirs at law are entitled to receive his distributive share in the estate of his father, Benjamin Reese, recently deceased in England. Said share amounts to \$10,000, which such heirs may obtain through Chambers & Smith, attorneys, 245 Insurance Building, upon proper identification.

"Identification," Martin repeated to himself, as the corpse of a smile came onto his face; "there's plenty of cops would make short work of identifying Tim Reese if I'd shave this beard."

Identification! For six months he had been fighting it—fleeing from it as from a curse; and now it came to coax and wheedle him.

"The heirs of George B. Reese;" there was but one, himself; and he remembered well how his father had always counted on getting something sometime from the old place. "Ten thousand dollars! 'Twould make a lady of her, so it would," he muttered; and even as he said it his voice grew softer.

"She'd be a beauty, if she had half a show. They would have a guardian

appointed, and he'd send her to school, and she'd take her place with the best of 'em, instead of lying there worn to the bone and hungry."

His soul grew hungry, and his eyes moist and dreamy as he spoke; but the prison picture shot across his brain again, and he stretched his arms above his head to feel his freedom, and swore such oaths as made the angels shudder.

Those sleepless nights in which he had planned his escape, when hope grew and died, and rose and grew again; when he was mocked by disappointment and despair! The joy of success at last! The ecstasy of outwitting Cerberus and struggling up to day again!

The hiding, the alarms, the terrors, like hot iron on the raw flesh—the finding of his daughter, now motherless and doubly cherished—the lodgings, like heaven, while he had work—the ever gnawing fear of recapture!

Through all this he had come; and to go back now! "By heavens, no!" he shouted, and stamped his foot.

There came a restless sound from behind the curtain. He hastened thither on tiptoe. A weak voice broke the silence, dreamily.

"Only three pairs done today, Daddy—I was so tired—and I couldn't——"

The voice sank into silence. The man quivered as one in delirium.

He staggered to the table, and sank upon the chair beside it. His palms clasped his forehead, and his bowed shoulders labored like a hull in the tempest.

And then, as comes the glint of the distant sail in the eyes of the drowning shipwrecked ones, as comes the tap of the pick from far to the ear of the entombed miner, came hope dawning into the man's heart.

He rose; he stood erect; he put his arms wide apart; he filled his lungs with the night air. He had solved the riddle. He was at peace.

He lighted again his bit of candle, and shaved himself clean. He found a pencil, and on a bit of wrapping paper wrote long and laboriously.

Folding his letter carefully, he directed it to Messrs. Chambers & Smith, and pinned it inside another note, which read thus:

LITTLE DAUGHTER: Better times have come for us both. I am going out for a while; and as soon as you get up I want you to take this letter to its address, and do just what the gentlemen tell you. Goodby. Your loving Father.

Leaving the letters on the table, the convict quietly left the room.

* * * * *

At the Central Police Station the next morning the officers were gathering to relieve the night detail upon their beats. Riley, No 237, from the Commercial Street beat, came tramping in. He went to Detective Morrissey, and stood laughing before him.

"You're left, Morrissey; Tim Reese is took."

"The devil! Where?"

"To the morgue, in the dead wagon. He'd hacked his jugular wide open with a pocket knife, and he's the deadest bird you ever saw."

"Then my little fake 'ad' about the ten thousand dollars is no good. Them's hard lines," quoth Detective Morrissey.

THE ARGOSY.

VOL. XXIX.

MARCH, 1899.

No. 4.

THE GOLD HUNTERS OF THE MOUNTAIN STAR.

BY CAPTAIN R. M. HAWTHORNE.

A tale of hidden treasure, of hard fighting, of a bold dash for freedom—The spectral pickets and the treacherous renegade—The final stratagem that disposed of a persistent pursuer.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.—A UNIQUE ENTERPRISE.

THE steamer Explorer, which made irregular trips up the Yellowstone to a point more than a hundred miles above Bison Rapids, carried a cargo of the most varied and picturesque nature. This was because the main purpose of her voyage was barter with the Indians, who occasionally proved uncomfortably numerous along the shores of that romantic river of the Northwest.

Among the articles piled above and below decks were blankets, rifles, ammunition, whisky, and trinkets, and nearly every variety of musical instrument, even to the extent of two melodeons. There were also pigments, bridles, saddles and so on to the end of an almost endless list.

The Explorer's principal voyage was made in the spring, for it was then that the peltries of the wild animals of that region were ready for delivery. It is well known that no animal is trapped for its fur in the summer time, because it is scant of hair and of little value. But with the coming of cold weather, thoughtful nature provides her children with warm, glossy overcoats, so valuable that envious man willingly undergoes every kind of hardship, even to the facing of death itself, that he may pilfer the property from its rightful owner.

Now, on the spring voyage of the Explorer with which we have to do, her cargo was more peculiar in one respect than ever before, for she carried on her forward deck another boat, the Mountain Star, which will play an important part in the incidents of the succeeding pages.

This craft, of course, was in sections. The engine had been taken apart, the only portions remaining intact being the boiler (which it wouldn't have done to disintegrate), and the hull.

The latter was of peculiar pattern and a trifle over thirty feet in length.

It crowded the forward deck of the Explorer, but was so carefully adjusted and secured in place that it received no injury on the long voyage up the Yellowstone.

Just here a few words of explanation must be given. Twenty odd miles above Fort Walling, the Yellowstone receives a tributary from the Northwest known as Wild Cat Fork. It is navigable for small steamboats for a distance of three hundred miles from its mouth; but, down to the time we have in mind, its waters had never been rippled by any craft larger than an Indian canoe, and it looked as if such would be the case for many years to come.

This was not due to the loneliness of the unsettled region so much as to the fact that for ten miles above the main stream the Wild Cat is a series of cascades, rapids, and waterfalls, up which not even an Indian could make his way in a canoe, without resorting to several score portages. Doubtless in the not distant future these engineering difficulties will be overcome, and it will be an ordinary excursion for one of the regular Yellowstone steamers to turn off into the Wild Cat Fork and ascend the stream for several hundred miles.

The owners of the Mountain Star had a project in mind which probably has already been suspected by the reader. It was to transport the parts of the boat around Bison Rapids, to a point ten miles above, and there put them together. Then the craft would be ready for use on a deep, winding stream, navigable for a distance of three hundred miles into the wild, gloomy and mountainous solitudes of the Northwest.

Three men were interested in this unique enterprise. They were Hugh Hartley, or "Montana Hugh;" Burden Burnett, known as "Baldy Burden," because of his luxuriant hair; and Jack Murfree, called "Jersey Jack" by his companions, for the reason that he hailed from New Jersey.

The first two were grizzled hunters and trappers, who had spent their lives since early boyhood in the Western wilderness. Jack Murfree, however, was not only much younger than his friends, but he was a graduate of Princeton College. Unexpectedly thrown upon his own resources, he had come westward in quest of his fortune.

It is unnecessary to give an account of his many ups and downs before he was thrown into the companionship of Hartley and Burnett, whose friendship he won by his pluck and manly qualities. The three became comrades in every sense of the term, each ready at any time to risk his life for the sake of the others.

The plan of transporting the small steamer to the head of Bison Rapids, and there putting it together for use in the Wild Cat Fork, was Jack Murfree's idea. He saw in it a chance to gather thousands of dollars' worth of peltries from the Indians, who never brought their goods as far south as the Yellowstone, and who would be eager to part with them at such a trifling value as to insure enormous profits to the white men, who at the end of their return trip could readily portage their furs around Bison Rapids.

It will be perceived that the most serious difficulty which confronted the three was to get the component parts of the Mountain Star to the head of the rapids. That accomplished, everything else would be easy.

Jack Murfree was not only a natural mechanic, but he also possessed a

practical knowledge of steam engines, sufficient for every possible requirement.

The plan was to transport the material to the head of the rapids by means of four toughened, veteran mules, and the massive framework of a wagon. Much of the stuff could be carried on the backs of the animals, but two portions, the boiler and the hull, could not be handled in that manner.

"If these critters were about ten times as broad in the back and a little stronger," said Montana Hugh, "we could load the b'iler onto one of 'em and let him tramp straight ahead to the top of the rapids, and there we'd be."

"But how would you manage the hull?" asked Jack.

"Load it onto two of the animals, one in front and the other at the rear. We'd let the prow stick out ahead, so it would act like a wedge, and cut a way for us."

"It is going to be the biggest job we ever undertook," remarked Baldy Burden: "you see we don't know what kind of a country we've got to work our way through."

"Yes, we do," observed Hugh, with emphasis.

"None of us has ever been over it."

"That makes no difference; the only kind of country found in these parts is the worst in all creation."

"We shall have to put our shoulders to the wheel and help push," was the comment of Jack Murfree; "nothing is impossible to him who wills."

"I've heard that doctrine afore, but it don't always work by a jugful."

"If the mules and ourselves are unequal to the task, we can hire fifty or a hundred Indians to help us."

Montana Hugh gave a sniff of contempt.

"Hire Injins! In the first place, a redskin will die afore he'll work like a white man, and in the next place, every bloody mother's son of 'em that larns of our coming will give his whole time to raising our h'ar. When they get through Burnett won't be the only bald headed man in the crowd."

"It seems to me," said Jack, "that all this was discounted before we left St. Louis, and there's no use of getting blue over it now."

"Still it don't do any harm to look matters in the face."

"When disposed to be discouraged, think of the reward that is sure to follow success on our part."

Jack Murfree lowered his voice as he uttered the last words, and looked around to make sure that none of the crew of the Explorer overheard him.

Indeed, it was indisputable from the manner of himself and companions that the ostensible purpose of their contemplated voyage up Wild Cat Fork was a pretense, intended to parry suspicion as to the real object.

As will speedily appear, this was of more momentous importance than any other person on the Explorer suspected.

CHAPTER II.—A STRANGE BUT SUGGESTIVE DISCOVERY.

THERE is precious little romance in transporting the constituent parts of a small steamboat overland through the roughest section of country conceiv-

able, and the declaration of one of the three men concerned that it was the most difficult job of their lives was verified to the last particular.

It required several hours, with the assistance of the crew of the Explorer, to land the material, and the day was well advanced when the laborious task was completed. It was accompanied by any amount of good natured chafing, and Captain Adams only voiced the sentiments of every one of his men, when he declared his unalterable conviction that on his return a week or more later, he would find the rusty and decaying remains of the steamer awaiting him on the bank.

But the three comrades bravely attacked the stupendous task. Under the most favorable circumstances, over ordinary roads, several trips would be necessary. It remained to be seen whether even one was possible.

The plan adopted was to load each of the four mules with a moderate burden, made up of the smaller castings and pieces, and then to plunge straight into the solitude, advancing in single file, and seeking the most available route.

A remarkable experience awaited the party. Montana Hugh, by virtue of his greater age and experience, took the lead, with the others trailing after him. The ground was moderately ascending throughout the entire distance, but stunted pines, rocks, boulders, gullies, and masses of stone seemed to be everywhere.

Time and again it looked as if the road were blocked and further progress out of the question. The wonderful woodcraft of Hugh, however, was always equal to the demand and by turning abruptly to the right or left and searching for a few minutes he was certain to find a way out of the difficulty, and his cheery signal apprised his waiting friends and animals the right course to follow.

Thus the progress continued until a couple of miles were traversed, when the gathering darkness made it necessary to camp for the night. They halted near enough to the rapids to secure what water was needed; wood was all around them, while they had brought sufficient rations to last for several days. The grass was green and succulent, so that no requisite for comfort was lacking. Moreover, they were in a section where the finest of game abounded, and the food was brought with them only for convenience.

All this was well enough in its way, but an overwhelmingly discouraging fact confronted them. It was utterly impossible, even with fifty mules at command, to carry the hull or iron boiler over the route, since they would have to be loaded upon the wagon, whereas the utmost that could be done was for the animals to advance in single file.

Even Jack Murfree was disheartened, though reluctant to confess it.

"The hull being of wood," he said, "we may manage by taking it apart, but it would be the most laborious kind of work to put it together again so as to prevent leaking."

"And there's no use, as it strikes me, to untie the hull when one can't do it with the b'iler."

"Exactly; it is out of the question, placed as we are, to unrivet and then to rivet the boiler. I'm afraid we shall have to give it up as a bad job, but, even without the steamer, we'll push on either by boat or mule. How far is

it, Baldy, to—you know where," he added significantly and glancing around, as if afraid that some stranger might learn their secret.

"It's close onto three hundred miles—as fur as we could go with the boat if it was in working order."

"That makes a fellow feel bad, for I fear the mules can't serve us for more than half the distance."

"Not as much as that; we should have to pick our way on foot, or borrow some of the Injin canoes and paddle up stream."

"I reckon we are equal to that if the necessity arises."

"You ain't more than three miles and a half from the facts."

The night was keen and sharp, and the fire kindled against a towering rock radiated a warmth that was grateful. The unladen mules were left free to crop the grass and sleep when they chose, while the men, after smoking and conversing somewhat gloomily for a time, stretched out to slumber in their blankets.

The action of the party in lying down to sleep throughout the night without any one standing guard may seem exceptional, but two veterans like Montana Hugh and Baldy Burden made no blunders in that respect. There was nothing to be feared from Indians in that section, although the newcomers had need to keep their wits about them, and to exercise unremitting vigilance before going far above Bison Rapids. It may be added that this danger, peculiar to the wild regions of the Northwest, increased as they ascended Wild Cat Fork, and formed the most serious factor in the difficult problem they had set out to solve.

The surprise came with the following morning, which was clear, bright, and invigorating. Breakfast was eaten at an early hour, the mules brought together and laden, and Hugh, as before, assumed the task of "blazing" the route to be pursued. Although but a little way in advance, he was out of sight and had not gone a furlong when his shout was heard:

"Wall, I'll be hanged! Come here powerful quick!"

"What's the matter?" called Jack Murfree in return.

"Come and find out!"

Halting the four animals, the two men hurried forward. Each had his Winchester tightly grasped, and Jack, who was slightly in advance, reached down and made sure that his revolver was at command. Baldy Burden almost trod on his heels.

They had gone but a short distance through the underwood and around the boulders when they caught sight of their guide, standing motionless, looking toward them, as if impatient at their tardiness.

In answer to their inquiries as they came up, he pointed ahead with the question:

"Did you ever see the like of *that*?"

Something similar had been seen by all of them many times, but certainly the sight never caused so much pleased astonishment.

In front and following a course substantially parallel with the stream, was a trail so well defined that, if it continued of the same character, it could be traveled by the animals as readily as the smooth, open prairie.

Furthermore, there could be no doubt that it not only penetrated well to the northward, but reached in the opposite direction to the Yellowstone. Had the party known of its existence, they could have used it from the first and saved the exhausting labor to which the mules had been subjected.

"Now," said the pleased Hugh, after the three had exchanged congratulations, "there ain't nothing in a reg'lar trail to make a refined gentleman like me yell his head lose, but what took my breath away on the first off was that that same trail is wide 'nough to let our wagon pass over."

Jack Murfree walked forward a few paces along the path, stooped down and examined it with care. Then he, too, uttered an expression of astonishment.

"No wonder! A wagon *has* been over this route."

The assertion sounded so incredible that his friends would not believe it until they, too, made use of their eyes. It took but a few minutes to convince them of the truth of the astounding declaration.

There were the unmistakable impression of wagon wheels, but so faint and obscured that it was evident they had been made years before. In many places the marks were entirely obliterated, while in others they were quite distinct.

"It seems like a miracle, but beyond all question a wagon has passed this way. It must have belonged to white men, for the wild Indian, I believe, never makes use of such a vehicle."

Jack looked inquiringly at his friends, who nodded their heads, while Hugh blurted out the natural questions:

"Who in thunder could they've been, where did they come from, and where were they going?"

Since none could answer the queries, the three devoted a half hour to investigation, passing quite a distance up the train or roadway, as it might be considered.

The result of their work was the discovery that the wagon which had preceded them so long a time before had gone toward the northwest, that is, in the same direction they were following: it was drawn, as proven by the size of the hoof prints that occasionally showed, by two horses, and having passed deeper into the solitude, had never returned.

CHAPTER III.—DEAD MAN'S MINE.

THE party decided to push on over the newly discovered highway through the wilderness. It had not yet been established that it extended to the head of Bison Rapids, and naturally, they were anxious to learn the truth.

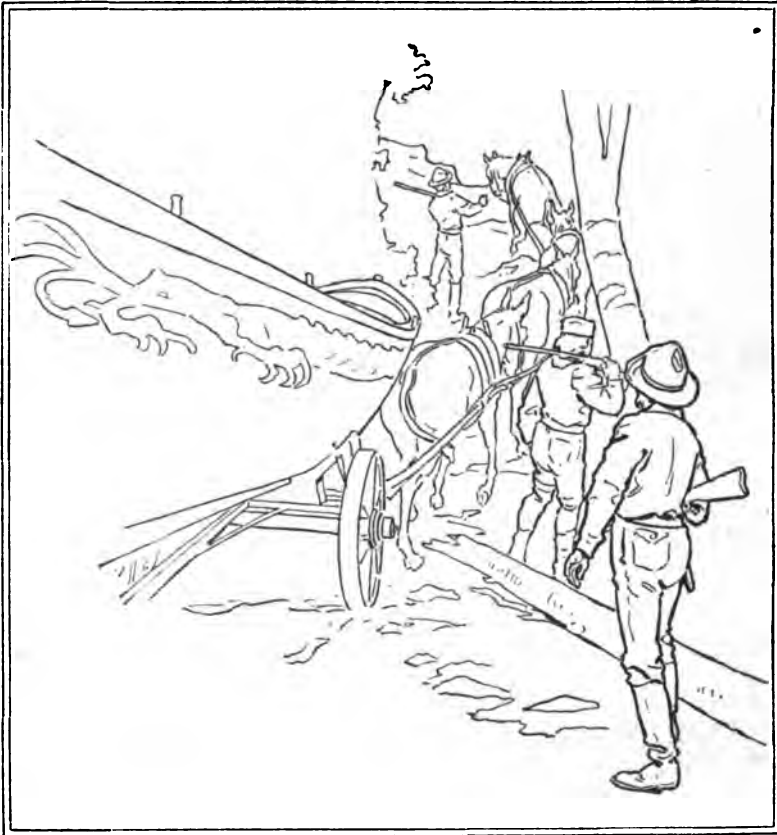
It proved to be just what they desired, for following the course of the stream, and never deviating far from it, it came to the water a short distance above the rapids, where it disappeared as if the mysterious wagon and its owner or owners had driven straight into the river and perished with their animals.

Hastily unloading their mules, their burdens were deposited on the ground. Then the men mounted and turned the noses of their beasts south-

ward. There were many places where the pioneers over this route had been obliged to cut away the obstructing pines, to make to some extent the bed of the road, and in other cases to deviate far to the right or left.

But whoever they were, they were masters of their business, and the winding roadway led to a point on the bank of the Yellowstone not a hundred yards from where the hull and boiler of the Mountain Star lay soggly awaiting shipment.

It was the most welcome of all discoveries to the three men, for it proved



THEY STARTED BRAVELY FORWARD WITH THEIR PONDEROUS LOAD.

the possibility of getting the material to the point they had fixed upon above the rapids.

Although night was at hand when they returned to their starting point, they set to work with a will, and accomplished considerable before knocking off work until the morrow.

They were astir very early in the morning, before it was fairly light. The four powerful mules were hitched to the strong framework of the wagon, and they needed little urging to start bravely forward with their ponderous load.

Where help was needed, the men gave it eagerly, and early in the afternoon the point above the rapids was reached. With the aid of levers, chains, and the best utilization of strength, the boiler was safely lowered to the ground, and the return to the Yellowstone begun without delay, the three perched on the wagon frame and urging the teams to a rocking and dangerous speed, which brought the journey to a completion while the night was still young.

The report of a rifle, some distance down the Yellowstone, warned the men that they had neighbors, undoubtedly Indians, and although little was feared from them, the comrades took turns in standing watch. The night, however, passed without disturbance, and an equally early start was made on the following morning, with the hull of the little steamer carefully adjusted and secured in place. That and a few minor articles inside of it constituted the last load, which was skilfully lowered into the deep water at the head of Bison Rapids.

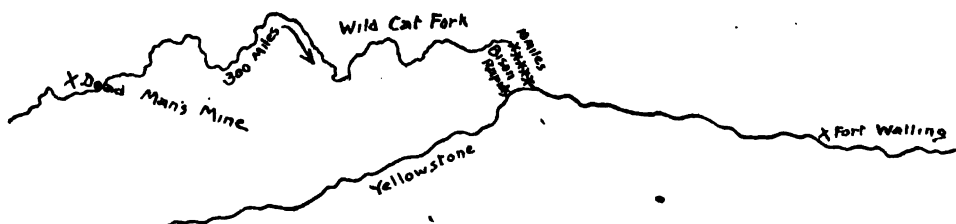
When night again closed in, the boiler was in position and the hard work completed. All that remained was to adjust the machinery, make the necessary connections, and take on board all the wood that could be carried to serve as fuel for the engine.

The last task was assumed by Hugh Hartley and Burden Burnett, while Jack Murfree, because of his superior knowledge and skill, took upon himself the duty of imparting the final touches to the craft.

That night, after their evening meal, and when they were gathered around the roaring wood fire, Jack Murfree drew from his inner pocket a folded piece of paper.

He handled it with a care and delicacy that showed how tenderly he prized it. He held it so that the glow of the firelight fell upon its surface, and his companions sat close to him, in order not to lose the slightest feature.

All three had studied the document until the need of it vanished; for it and what it contained were photographed indelibly upon their memories. This is what the heavy yellow paper showed:



"Hugh," suddenly said Jack Murfree, turning his head so as to look into his friend's face, "have you never felt any doubt of the story told you by Jeff Bagstock?"

"No, sir," was the emphatic response, "not for a single minute. I'd 've trusted my life to Jeff's word."

"That's what all three of us are doing," was the significant comment of Jack.

"And we're safe, so fur as b'lieving Jeff," added Burnett, who evidently

shared Hugh's opinion. "I knowed him from the time he was a big lad who come West from Independence, Missouri, to go into the trapping business."

"Yes," said Hugh, "I jined you soon after that, and we all three spent a dozen years hunting and trapping for the American Fur Company. Then Jeff went into Oregon and worked for the Hudson Bay people. I heerd of him off and on for twenty years after that. He made several trips with Kit Carson. Kit once told me that no whiter man than Jeff ever lived, and he wouldn't tell a lie to save himself from being skulped by redskins."

"There couldn't be stronger testimony than that."

"And Kit Carson always knowed what he was talking about, and there never lived a better fudge of men than him."

"Such is his reputation," remarked Jack, "though it was never my good fortune to meet him."

"Bein' as he died and was buried in Santa Fé afore you crossed the Mississippi, you didn't have much show for meeting him."

"Wal," said Hugh, "I've told you the story often 'nough for you to know it by heart. In some way, he never told me how, Jeff larned that there's a place three hundred miles up Wild Cat Fork where there's 'nough gold to make a hundred men rich. I 'spect he picked up the fact from some of the Injins that he made friends with, and they let him into the secret."

"Did he get any of the gold for himself?"

"I could never larn whether he did or not; you see when I met Jeff at Fort Walling he was down with his last sickness, and two days later he passed in his checks. I hadn't much chance to discuss politics with him."

"Did he explain why the place is called 'Dead Man's Mine'?"

"'Cause every fellow that tries to get the gold that's laying loose up there is a dead man."

"But Jeff himself survived long enough to get back."

"I don't know that he ever tried to git the gold."

"How then could he make this map of the place?"

"He didn't make it."

"How can you know that?"

"'Cause Jeff knowed only one letter in the alphabet, and that he always got wrong."

"Who then drew this map or diagram?"

"Dunno; Jeff must have got it from some one."

"And what was it he told you, Hugh?" asked Burnett.

"That Dead Man's Mine is chuckful of gold, but the Injins keep eternally close watch of it and thus far have killed every white man that has tried to take any of it away, which the same being the fact, we three gentlemen are going to try it. Am I right, gentlemen?"

"Right you are," was the prompt response of his friends.

CHAPTER IV.—IS IT IMPOSSIBLE?

JACK MURFREE was too strongly impressed with the difficulties of the voyage before him and his friends to sacrifice anything to impatience. He

meant that when the eventful trip up the stream was begun, there should be no lack of preparation, so far as the little steamer was concerned.

While Montana Hugh and Baldy Burden, therefore, busied themselves with chopping wood of the right length and carefully piling it on board the boat, he examined and adjusted the different parts of the machinery, making sure that all the bearings were fixed to a nicety, and that nothing was neglected that could insure the success of the trying and novel undertaking.

The length of the Mountain Star, as already stated, was about thirty feet. The boiler was upright, in order to save room, and the propulsion was by means of a screw, which was capable of driving the craft through still water at the rate of fifteen or eighteen miles an hour.

The men from whom they purchased it in St. Louis insisted that it had made twenty miles. Running against the current, the steamer probably would not average more than one half that speed, if indeed it did as well.

It was to be expected that they would encounter difficult passages, especially as they approached the upper waters, but by starting at daylight, and keeping at it until night, they were hopeful of making a hundred miles daily. There was reason, therefore, to believe that, if all went well, they would reach the immediate neighborhood of Dead Man's Mine in the course of three or four days.

No one of the three had ever seen Wild Cat Fork until they threaded their way to the head of Bison Rapids, but Hugh and Burden had talked with hunters at Fort Walling, who had trapped and traded near the headwaters, and thus gained valuable information, which was carefully stored away in their retentive memories.

It may be added that the Mountain Star was intended solely for use, and in appearance she was anything but an attractive craft.

The boiler being at the stern, was protected from the weather by a screen of coarse, strong canvas, which extended the length of the boat, in order to shield the wood and crew from the elements. A vacant space amidships afforded room for cooking and sleeping upon the blankets, the only bedding that the men took with them. Stowed in the bottom of the craft were several duplicates of parts of the machinery to be used in the event of accident.

Enough rations were left to last a couple of days, and they expected to shoot some of the game with which this wild country abounded.

Nothing was taken with the party which they had not reason to believe would be needed. Axes, shovels, picks, knives, ammunition and a few simple cooking utensils formed the principal part. The four mules were turned loose to take care of themselves, which they could readily do in such a favored section.

One or two points in the preparation for the voyage were due to Jack Murfree, and must be mentioned. Inasmuch as the expectation was to enter a region where many of the Indians had never seen a white man, the Mountain Star was made as impressive in appearance as possible. The wooden sides were first painted black, and then, cavorting along the hull and meeting at the point of the prow, were depicted with considerable artistic skill two fiery dragons, with forked tongues and prodigious teeth, the colors used being

white, yellow and crimson. The effect was startling, even upon a civilized mind, and was well calculated to impress the imagination of a savage.

The name of the boat was painted in white letters on the stern, with the city of New York as the hailing port, seeing which one might well conclude that the Mountain Star had wandered a long way from home.

Moreover, the boat was provided with a whistle out of all proportion to her size, for it would have served very well for an ocean steamer. When the rope connecting with it was drawn taut, the hoarse blast that awoke the echoes of the mountains and bluffs was enough to scare every man and animal within hearing. As long as the whistle was kept going, the steam gauge steadily moved backward, with the certainty that only a brief while was needed to exhaust the boiler.

Bearing in mind the hideous looks of the craft and its awful voice, it can readily be understood that, to put it mildly, it was sure to create a sensation when the red men looked upon it for the first time.

Although the object of this expedition was of the highest importance, the plan of procedure which the three men had in mind was simple. Had they penetrated the long distance required to reach Dead Man's Mine, by going on foot or on mules, they would of necessity be compelled to return by the same means.

This would not only be a difficult and laborious undertaking, especially as they hoped to bring back a good deal of gold, but they would be in continual danger of pursuit, with every chance of being shot and having the precious metal taken from them. The gruesome legends attached to Dead Man's Mine were all based upon such attempts by luckless adventurers.

But, suppose the little steamer were hidden somewhere under the bank within a few miles of the auriferous deposit. It might be difficult, but it ought not to be impossible, to store the precious cargo upon her.

This done, the crew had only to turn the prow of the boat down stream and put on all steam. Assisted by the current, she would speed along the swift river at the rate of a mile in two minutes, and the men could laugh at pursuit. There would be no labor worth naming in transporting the gold, the ten miles around the rapids being all that could be considered real work, and, if they should find two or three of the mules awaiting them, even that trouble would be eliminated from the task.

It will be noted that the success of the expedition was predicted on the hope that nearly everything would go well from the beginning; but, because an extraordinarily good piece of fortune had enabled them to transport the parts of the steamer above the impassable rapids, and to put them together, there was no reason to believe that that was the last obstacle to be encountered.

Although it was the spring of the year, with each day bringing summer nearer, they were liable to meet the most terrific of storms. The head of the Mountain Star was turned toward the vast Rocky Mountain range, which is the source of so many streams and where so many frightful tempests are born. Indeed pieces of ice drifting past gave notice of what was to be expected of that nature.

Seemingly the most improbable good fortune was that they should find the river navigable to the extent of three hundred miles. Of necessity, it must narrow and grow smaller as they ascended, while the rough country through which it passed almost for its entire course made certain that there were rapids, canyons and tortuous passages through which the boat could not force its way were its propulsive power increased ten fold.

Moreover, while the demoniac whistle and the appearance of the Mountain Star were likely to cause consternation among the ignorant Indians, when they first looked upon the craft, it would not do to reckon upon a continuance of the peculiar advantage. There must be among the red men some who had heard of the steamers on the Yellowstone and the Missouri, and they would understand what it all meant.

It may be said that neither Jack Murfree nor his companions counted upon everything going right from the beginning. They only hoped that it would, or that they might ascend Wild Cat Fork far enough to lessen the danger of securing and bringing away some of the gold in Dead Man's Mine, and it may be added that when the Mountain Star headed northward she began a voyage from which it was decreed she should never return.

CHAPTER V.—UP WILD CAT FORK.

MONTANA HUGH and Baldy Burden finished loading the steamer early in the afternoon. The wood was piled in every available space, rising several feet above the gunwales, and since some of it was heavy and full of sap the craft had all she could comfortably carry.

Finally, everything being in tip top shape, the rope which held the craft to the stump of a tree was cast off and the Mountain Star headed out in the stream.

She worked perfectly. The wood was so carefully adjusted that she was balanced to a hair on her keel; she obeyed her rudder promptly; the screw churned the water into foam and drove the boat ahead as smoothly as if she were moving over oil, and the keen prow, cutting the clear current like a knife, sent broadening ripples away on each side of the boat.

"It beats all creation," was the admiring exclamation of Hugh; "Jersey, you could make a fortune running a steamboat."

"I hope to be able to run this one so that we shall *all* make our fortunes," was the modest reply, as the young man held the tiller easily in hand and steered the craft.

"It looks to me as if we're going 'bout a hundred miles an hour," observed Burden.

Jack glanced at the shore on either hand and replied:

"Our rate is about one tenth of that; if the river remains clear of rapids and obstructions, we can keep it up without burning much wood; suppose you fling in a few more sticks, Hugh."

The suggestion was immediately followed, and the progress of the boat continued, the captain, as the young man may be considered, holding the steamer near the middle of the channel.

"The trouble of this business," he explained, "is that none of us knows anything about the river, or at most, not enough to serve us. We are liable to run upon a sunken rock and split the hull beyond repairing, or to jam our nose into the mud and stick fast."

"It strikes me that I may help to guard against that," remarked Hugh, who hastily scrambled over the wood to the prow, where he seated himself.

His purpose was to keep watch against the dangers named by Jack. The water was of crystalline clearness, and he could see for a considerable distance ahead. In many places, where the current was fifteen or twenty feet in depth, he discerned the pebbles on the bottom, and once he saw a large fish dart away like a shadowy streak, frightened by the huge object that was gliding above his home.

"Helloa! sheer off! There's a rock as big as a house!" he suddenly called, in considerable excitement, unaware of the proper marine term to use.

Captain Jack promptly obeyed, and as the craft shot past he glanced over the side of the boat and saw the huge mass of stone. It was so far down in the water, however, that he smiled; for the steamer would have ridden safely over it with a foot to spare. But he was pleased with the watchfulness of his friend.

The necessity of going at moderate speed was evident. The amazement and admiration of Hugh were unbounded when the youthful captain again veered to one side in time to avoid a rock, which reached within a few inches of the surface.

Turning his head, he asked in wonderment:

"How'd you know that, Jersey?"

"Nothing could be plainer; the ripple on the surface warned me."

"Wal, I'll be hanged! I never thought of that; yender is another of 'em; look out!"

"That's all right," replied Jack with a smile, steering straight over the spot, to the dismay of the hunter, who gathered himself to spring at the right moment; but, though the rock was there, it was too far down to be dangerous.

"You will soon learn from the look of the ripples how deep down the rocks are," added the captain.

By way of comment, Hugh climbed over the wood again and took his station beside his two friends.

"I ain't of no account," he explained; "I was allers reckoned to have purty good eyesight, but it don't count alongside of Jersey."

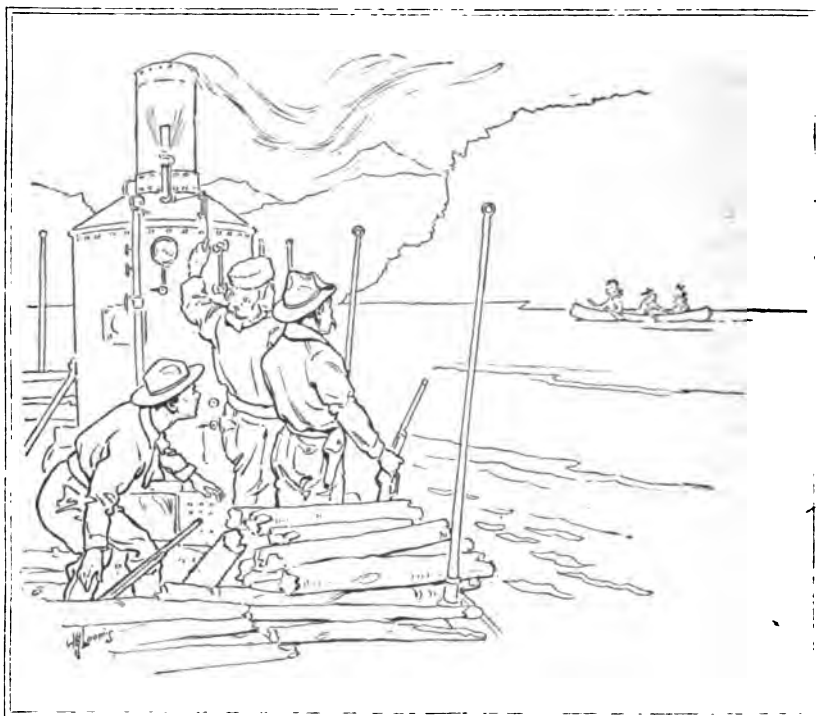
Both shores were thickly wooded with pine, among which gray masses of rocks showed at intervals, and a little way up stream a small brook tumbled over the stones and splashed into the river. To the left and several miles distant, a wooded mountain rose to a height of perhaps a thousand feet, while a long way beyond towered a spur of the Rockies, reaching to the clouds.

The crest was white with snow, and a gentle breeze which crinkled the surface of the river had an icy chill, which it must have caught from those arctic summits.

Wild Cat Fork, at the point where the steamer began its upward voyage, was barely an eighth of a mile wide. One peculiarity of the streams in the

northwest, not characteristic of the Eastern rivers, is that many of them flow for long distances with little or no diminution in their width. Thus the Missouri and Yellowstone may be followed for hundreds of miles, the former through the Bad Lands, with the stream undergoing slight variation of width.

The information which Montana Hugh had gathered regarding Wild Cat Fork was that it was marked by the same peculiarity. Three hundred miles above Bison Rapids its width is two thirds as great as at its foot. It was



IN THE CANOE WERE TWO INDIAN BRAVES AND A SQUAW.

to be expected, however, that between its headwaters and its outlet were many shrunk and perilous passages, in which the effectiveness of the craft would be subjected to an extreme test.

When the outlook showed that deep water continued for a considerable distance, and the steam gauge was blowing off, Captain Jack gave the engine full head, eager to test the speed of his craft.

The result was thrilling. The Mountain Star sped over the water like a swallow, the spray and mist flying the length of the boat and wetting the men, while the still air was fanned into a gale. The velocity surprised Jack Murfree himself, who was convinced, not counting the current, that it was fully twenty miles an hour. Who should say how useful such speed might prove to them?

At considerable risk, he allowed the astonishing swiftness to continue as

they began sweeping around a bend in the stream, though, needless to say, he was keenly alert for the telltale ripples.

They were rounding into another straight stretch of water, when Baldy Burden uttered an exclamation at sight of something which the others observed at the same moment. A long, birchen canoe was leisurely crossing from the left to the right bank. In it were seated two Indian braves and a squaw, the latter in the stern with a blanket wrapped about her shoulders, while her escort were swinging the long ashen paddles with an easy stroke that showed they had abundance of leisure at their disposal.

The instant Captain Jack caught sight of them he turned the prow straight toward the boat and continued his tremendous progress. At the same moment he pulled the cord controlling the whistle, and the hoarse, unearthly screech echoed between the shores with a volume and infernal strength that was enough to lift a man off his feet.

If three persons were ever panic stricken, they were the three Indians in the canoe. They sat motionless, actually paralyzed for the moment with abject terror, while they stared at the hideous monster bearing down upon them with amazing speed. Then they suddenly rallied. The braves applied their paddles in frantic desperation, while the squaw, with a wild yell, plunged over the side of the canoe into the water, diving and swimming furiously for the shore.

Again the awful blast rang out, and it looked as if the warriors would tear their frail boat apart in their panic. The head of the squaw bobbed up at intervals, but she continued diving while fighting her way toward land.

Jack Murfree could easily have run the party down, but he had no such thought, and turning aside he sent back a farewell shriek from the whistle and continued up Wild Cat Fork at much reduced speed.

CHAPTER VI.—AT ANCHOR IN MID STREAM.

THIS frightening of the savages was rare sport for the crew of the Mountain Star, but anything else to the three victims of their joke. Hardly pausing to draw their canoe up the bank, the braves leaped out and plunged into the woods, followed by the dripping squaw, who, with a howl of dismay, dashed after them.

"If we could count on producing the same effect upon all the Indians we meet," said Jack, "it would simplify matters."

"It won't take them long to l'arn the truth," retorted Hugh, "and then, as like as not, they'll try to do us up."

The steamer had progressed but a little way further when the gathering gloom showed that night was closing in. It was too dangerous to attempt to ascend an unknown stream in the darkness, and there was no cause for haste. Reducing the speed still more, all three began scanning the bank for a suitable place to tie up for the night.

"There don't seem to be much difference," remarked Burden; "the banks are a little more rocky in some spots——"

At that instant all were flung forward so abruptly that had they not

grasped what was within reach, they would have fallen. The steamer had come to a sudden stop.

"The bottom is busted out!" exclaimed Hugh in consternation.

"It isn't as bad as that," said Jack, "but we have run upon a sandbar. It's mighty lucky we were going so slow."

It was fortunate indeed. The engine was reversed and the screw set revolving at the highest speed. The water was churned into mud and foam, and in a few minutes all felt the craft slowly retrograding. Shortly after it swung into deep water, and turning once more toward shore and feeling every foot of the way Jack Murfree was able to lay the boat alongside of the steep, wooded bank, so close that Hugh readily sprang to land, rope in hand and tied it fast to a pine sapling.

The voyage being over for the day the captain and engineer proceeded to "bank" his fires in the most approved fashion.

The night was crisp and cool. Nothing could be more acceptable than a warm meal, and the veterans proceeded to provide and then to partake of it.

Supper finished, the question arose as to whether it was more prudent to lie with the boat against the bank, or to anchor in midstream. The incident of a short time before proved that they were in the vicinity of Indians, a strong party of whom were likely to take it into their heads to make an investigation. Should such prove the case, the white men would be at much disadvantage if against the bank.

Accordingly, the rope was untied and taken aboard, and by means of poles the boat was worked out into the middle of the stream, where the iron anchor was dropped overboard and the craft settled to rest.

"I don't think there's much likelihood of the varmints bothering us," remarked Hugh; "but when you're in an Injin country, you must never sleep with both eyes shet. I'll watch till midnight and then call you, Jarsey, and when you think it's 'bout four o'clock, why give Baldy a kick that'll break two or three of his ribs and let him take his turn."

The arrangement was carried out. Tired, healthy, rugged, and strong, Jack Murfree and Burden Burnett had no more than stretched out on their blankets in the bottom of the boat when they were asleep. Montana Hugh sat at the prow, having a notion that he could use his eyes better at that point, and he did his duty faithfully.

It seemed to Jack Murfree that he had been unconscious only a few minutes when he was awakened by Hugh, who shook his shoulder.

"Anything the matter?" asked the young man, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"Nothing, only it's time you took your place as watch."

"Impossible!" replied Jack, who, drawing his match safe from his pocket, ignited the tiny stick.

"Well, 'm blessed!" he exclaimed in an undertone as he saw by the little twist of flame that it was half past twelve. Noted for his good nature, he rose to his feet and picked his way out from the hollow in the bottom of the boat, while Hugh nestled down beside his sleeping comrade.

Jack Murfree stationed himself at the stern, close to the small wheel

which he used in steering the steamer. Seating himself as comfortably as he could, and confident of keeping his wits about him, he addressed himself to an unpleasant duty which the traveler shirks at the risk of his life.

There was no moon in the sky, but it was without a cloud, and the stars shone with wonderful brilliancy. The young man was sure he had never seen the firmament so gleaming with the dazzling orbs, which were reflected from the silent, dark flowing water below. The scene was beautiful and impressive beyond description.

A faint murmur from the direction of the Rocky Mountains was so well defined at times that he suspected it was caused by the flow of the river through some canyon-like passage, or over rocks, as at Bison Rapids.

Suddenly something thumped at the front of the boat. Leaning over the gunwale he saw that it was a cake of ice, which, impinging against the prow, swung round and drifted harmlessly past. Then once more all became still.

It is at such times that one's nerves are the most sensitive, and sights and sounds which would not be noted on other occasions, impress us with startling distinctness. It cannot be said that Jack Murfree was troubled by any misgiving as to danger, for reason convinced him there was little ground for fear, but despite this fact, less than fifteen minutes had passed after the slight blow from the piece of floating ice, when he became absolutely certain that he and his companions were threatened by some danger, whose nature he was unable to divine, though all his senses were alert and he scanned the surrounding gloom with intense sharpness and listened for the slightest sound that could enlighten him.

CHAPTER VII.—A STRANGE VISITOR.

THE stargleam was wonderfully vivid, and the stillness impressive. Jack Murfree remained seated at the stern of the diminutive steamer, listening and peering around in the gloom to learn the cause of his strange misgiving. The mass of wood piled along the boat shut off his view of the prow, though, by rising to his feet, as when steering the craft, he could look over the top and see the stream beyond.

Suddenly he heard the rippling of the water. Convinced that it came from some point near at hand and directly up stream, he noiselessly rose to his feet, Winchester grasped, and peering over the mass of fuel, but he was unable to discern anything to explain the disturbing sound.

"It may have been a fragment of ice, or some drifting log that struck an obstruction," was his thought; "but it may mean, too, something else——"

At that moment the gunwale of the boat dipped down to the water's edge, and the startled young man uttered an exclamation, believing the steamer was capsizing. He grasped the wheel with one hand, while he peered around in the night to learn the cause of the alarming occurrence.

From out of the river rose a great dripping mass, directly in front of the scared Jack, and so close that he could have touched it with his hand. As it swept upward from the water, it emitted a cavernous growl, and its beam like paws, resting on the gunwale of the steamer, threatened to overturn it.

Jack knew on the instant the meaning of the terrifying occurrence. A grizzly bear had swum out from the shore and started to investigate the cause of this curious intrusion into his domain. With a temerity not often shown by his species, he swam along the side of the steamer until he reached the stern, when he rested his forepaws upon the gunwale and started to lift himself aboard.

It is probable that if he had persevered he would have swamped the boat, which could not have withstood such an enormous strain upon the center of gravity, conscious of which, Jack brought his Winchester to his shoulder and thrusting the muzzle between the snarling jaws fired literally down the throat of the monster.

In his agony and fury the bear made a sweeping blow at the young man, missing ripping off his face by so narrow a chance that Jack felt the wind of the vast paw as it curved past.

But the shot was one of those fortunate ones which in the case of the most skillful hunter are generally the result of chance. The weapon was providentially directed, and the bullet tore its way through the seat of life. With a thunderous growl the brute sagged backward into the water, releasing the gunwale, which bounded upward to its normal position just as Hugh and Burden, awakened by the occurrence, appeared, each with rifle in hand.

A few words made clear what had occurred, and Jack pointed to the black mass drifting away in the starlight.

"That was the most curiourest thing I ever knowed a grizzly to do," remarked Hugh, peering after the carcass that was gradually disappearing from sight; "them critters don't gin'rally poke their noses into places they don't know about, onless they have been wounded."

"I didn't wound him till he tried to climb on board."

"But he knowed you was going to," suggested Burden, "so he thought he'd settle it while he had the chance."

"That sort of logic is too much for me; but you folks may as well lie down again, for I shall rouse Burden at four o'clock."

The two men scrambled back to their sleeping quarters and again wrapped their blankets around them, sinking into slumber almost immediately. Such an occurrence with most people would have kept them awake for hours but, as has been remarked, one can become accustomed almost to anything.

Left once more to himself, Jack Murfree carefully examined the side of the boat where the bear had made his singular attempt to climb aboard. A lighted match revealed the scratches and dents made by the enormous claws, but no damage had been done.

It is generally considered necessary for a sentinel to keep in motion in order to fight off the insidious approach of drowsiness, but the Western hunters become so inured to their peculiar perils that one of them can pass a whole night, seated on the ground, without losing consciousness. Jack Murfree retained his place at the stern of the steamer, as alert and wide awake as when steering the craft up Wild Cat Fork, nor was he conscious of any feeling of sleepiness as the hours dragged slowly by.

From far up in the clear, cool ether came the honk of wild geese, who,

though they should have been resting at that hour, were flying southward. Once he saw a temporary twinkling against the stars, which showed where the birds were flying in the form of a mathematical figure or lines.

A half hour later the cry of some wild animal sounded from the depth of the solitude. It was a long drawn out, wailing tone, probably made by a mountain wolf, though the young man could not be certain of its identity, but it was in keeping with the hour and scene.

It was about this time that several curious facts impressed themselves upon Jack Murfree.

The first was that the character of the shore opposite the steamer seemed to be undergoing most remarkable changes. He remembered that an immense tree towered above the others in the neighborhood, and stood near the spot where they had tied the boat and gone ashore to prepare their supper. The upper portion of this tree was visible from the steamer after the anchor was dropped overboard. Jack had noticed it several times, but now when he looked at it he was amazed to find that it had changed its position.

Instead of being where he last noticed it, the tree was certainly further up stream. He rubbed his eyes and looked again at the spot where it ought to have been. It wasn't there, but was to the north of the place.

"I am not given to drink," mused the mystified Jack, "and if I were, there's nothing here for me to drink, but as sure as I'm a living man, there's something the matter with that tree or—with me. Great Caesar!"

The lofty tree was actually fading from sight up stream.

He pinched himself to make sure he was not dreaming, and then, with an instinctive reaching for relief, he withdrew his gaze from the puzzling spot and looked out on the river.

And lo! another wonder. A piece of ice, several yards in width, was so close to the boat that it was in plain sight. Instead of drifting past, as a well regulated cake of ice should have done, it had come to a stop, as if, like the bear, it was curious to learn something about the Mountain Star.

But Jack Murfree had need to look for only a few moments at this apparent violation of one of nature's laws to learn the truth.

Turning to where the rope fastened to the anchor passed over the gunwale at the stern, he drew it aboard. It came up as light as a feather, for there was nothing attached to the other end. The grizzly bear in his flurry had broken the rope, or at any rate freed it from the anchor, and the steamer had been drifting for some time down stream.

It was not a very pleasant situation, thus to lose ground, but fortunately the young captain had the means at hand to check the downward drift of the craft. While there was no second anchor of the pattern lost, there was a large stone, heavy enough to take its place. He managed to roll this to the gunwale, where, after the rope was securely tied around it, he tumbled it overboard.

He was surprised to note the depth of the stream, but the anchor held, and he was relieved to know that the fastening was not likely to yield, since the strain upon it was not great.

Neither Hugh nor Baldy were roused by the trifling incident, but as soon

as it was time to call his relief, Jack awoke Burden and turned the care of the Mountain Star over to him.

CHAPTER VIII.—A FORMIDABLE FOE TO PROGRESS.

THE drift backward was no more than half a mile, and but for its ludicrous features, was not worth reference. As full of high spirits as so many schoolboys let out for a frolic in the woods, all three were astir at the first streaking of daylight. To their vast relief the weather remained clear, sunshiny and bright, though each fancied he could feel a touch of the snowy breath of the distant Rockies.

While Hugh and Burden busied themselves in preparing breakfast, Jack Murfree started the fire anew under the boiler of the engine, and, aided by the charred pine sticks of the preceding day and the resinous wood he had saved, he quickly had a roaring blaze, while the index on the gauge steadily climbed higher. Every part of the machinery was inspected and oiled, and when the hasty meal was finished, the Mountain Star once more headed up Wild Cat Fork.

Like the pilots on the Mississippi, Captain Jack's keen eye was able to form a clear idea of the dangers that threatened from the appearance of the surface of the water. That which meant nothing to his companions signified everything to him. Maintaining a fair rate of speed, he steered past sunken rocks and shallow places, while his companions looked on in wondering admiration.

The character of the shores continued much the same. They were densely wooded on both sides, enormous masses of rocks towered aloft, and in many places overhung the river so far that, like the leaning tower of Pisa, they seemed on the point of tumbling downward with a ruinous crash.

Although a goodly number of miles had been passed, and they were that much nearer the great Rocky Mountains, it was impossible to perceive that they were a foot closer to them than when they started on the previous day. This was likely to be the case for two or three days, and caused no comment on the part of the men.

The progress was unexpectedly smooth until the middle of the afternoon, when they steamed around a bend in the river and entered a narrow, canyon-like passage. The stream was compressed into one third of its usual width, and the current poured forward with a velocity that aroused misgiving in the voyagers.

"One thing is fortinit," observed Hugh; "this kenyon ain't more than two or three hundred yards long."

"I have noticed that," replied Jack, still peering forward, "but I fear it may prove just that much too long for us."

"Don't you think we can push through?"

"It looks dubious; that river has tremendous speed between the rocks."

"And there may be others in the kenyon to slither this boat to smithereens."

"There's no danger of that sort; if there was, you would see more foam

and spray, but notice how clear the current is all the way to the smooth water above."

"I had observed the same, but I didn't know that it signified anything like what you say; howsumever, I never acted as engineer, fireman, pilot, and captain on a steamboat, which the same I might observe of some folks."

"You will understand the matter as well as I before we are half way to Dead Man's Mine. All you have to do is to use your eyes; but here we go!"

Jack directed the prow of the steamer into the middle of the rapid torrent, and as on the day before, gave her full head.

Right gallantly did she do her work, sending the spray flying over the entire length of the boat, while she threatened to ship enough water to sink. But the chances had to be taken, and he did not spare her. The shower fell on the canvas awning, enough of it finding its way beneath to give all a good wetting.

A brave man fears the danger to which he is unaccustomed, and Hugh and Burden displayed a timidity that caused Jack to laugh and chaff them. They quickly braced up, and if they felt misgivings managed to conceal the signs of it.

Meanwhile, Jack kept glancing at the perpendicular walls of limestone that towered on either hand to the height of several hundred feet. He held his breath as the boat moved more and more slowly, until it finally stood still, and despite the fact that every available ounce of steam was employed in whirling the screw around, there came the dreaded moment when the massive walls began moving slowly forward.

In other words, the steamer, while doing her best, was being carried down stream by the impetuosity of the current. Finding it useless to try to stem the torrent, Jack shut off steam and allowed the craft to drift like a log into the comparatively calm water below.

Should it prove impossible to force the canyon, there remained the almost hopeless task of dragging the craft through by means of spliced ropes, pulled by the two men from the top of the cliffs, while Jack kept the engine up to the highest mark.

But he was not yet ready to abandon the attempt to make the passage. While the boat was drifting downward, he crammed the throat of the furnace with fat pine. In a brief while the safety valve was spitting steam at a dangerous rate. Then, turning the prow up stream again, he sent the craft straight for the canyon, with the screw revolving at a dizzying rate—in fact, to the highest number of revolutions of which it was capable.

This preliminary spurt gave the steamer an impetus that served her well. When she plunged into the furious current, it was accompanied by a slap and dashing sound that sent the spray flying twenty feet above the canvas covering. It was perilous recklessness, for that same canvas roof, which was never intended for such work, saved the boat from being swamped. A mass of water scooted over its entire length and shot off into the river again at the stern, which had it been received into the boat must have carried the prow under the surface.

When the point was attained where the boat was overcome on her first

attempt and compelled to fall back, she was still moving upward, though at a pace that was steadily slackening. Would the gain, even though moderate, continue until the comparatively calm water above was reached? The distance was slight, but the torrent was getting in its work in a way that was terrifying.

Instinctively men in such situations do childish things. Even Jack Murfree, while holding the spokes of the wheel, leaned forward as if to help the progress of the boat, while Hugh and Burden compressed their lips and actually pushed in the vain effort to add to the motion. Then as the speed slowly decreased, every one held his breath, fearful that his respiration might interfere with the action of the screw.

The naturally cool Jack Murfree was painfully nervous. He glanced to the right and left, and thanked Heaven that the boat was still moving, though at a painfully slow rate. Only a few rods more and the thing would be done, but the brave craft seemed unequal to the cruel task demanded of her.

Jack closed his eyes with a muttered prayer.

"When I open them again," he reflected, "we shall be either falling back or we shall be through this terrible place. The question must be decided within the next three minutes."

With his eyes shut, he felt the steamer tremble beneath him. The savage torrent, as if exasperated at the invasion, seemed to gather all its might to beat her back and surely the boat must succumb.

Jack was still blind when he heard Hugh Hartley shout. On the instant, he opened his eyes.

Could he believe what he saw? The Mountain Star had fought her way through the canyon and was plowing with heightened speed the comparatively mild current above. It seemed incredible, but it was the fact. Then he added his shout to those of his friends, and releasing one hand, swung his hat above his head.

"It was nobly done!" he said, "and done, too, at the time when I believed it utterly impossible."

He looked at his comrades, and then a serious expression crossed his face, for he asked himself the question:

"If we encounter such obstacles at the lower portion of the stream, how will it be a hundred or less miles above?"

CHAPTER IX.—PUSHING INTO THE NORTHWEST.

No country in the world can furnish so many "cranky" rivers as our own great West. Some of them, after flowing hundreds of miles in regulation fashion, dive into the ground, to come to the surface at some remote point, or perhaps to find their outlet far under the earth in the ocean. Others start out vigorously into the arid plain and gradually vanish, burned up by the intolerable fervor of the pitiless sun, while still others, after twisting their way through several States and Territories, writhe back almost to their starting point.

Fortunately, Wild Cat Fork displayed a few peculiarities that were in

favor of the Mountain Star and its crew. One has already been referred to—the very gradual diminution of its volume as the headwaters were approached. The information of Montana Hugh was that a boat of such light draft as their steamer could ascend a short distance above Dead Man's Mine.

Consequently, to the pleased surprise of Captain Jack and his comrades, they steamed steadily up the stream, until once more the day was drawing to a close, and during all that time the progress of the craft suffered no interruption. The solitude was wild and seemingly unbroken, but the clear, icy water swept downward on its long voyage to the Gulf with a certain majesty that was impressive. Occasionally fragments of ice drifted past, and many deviations were necessary to avoid the shoals and rocks.

It was only common prudence that caused Hugh and Burden to take their turn at the wheel. The task of steering the boat was so simple that they needed no instruction, and by and by they became tolerably skilful in interpreting the meaning of the ripples on the surface in advance.

Suddenly about the middle of the afternoon, when Hugh was taking his turn at the wheel, and Jack Murfree was on watch at the prow, the shores became invisible. The air was thick with snow, which whirled in grotesque gyrations about the boat, covering the canvas roof with its white blanket, corkscrewing underneath and blinding the three men.

Jack was on the point of ordering steam shut off and dropping the anchor, when, presto! the flurry was over. The air cleared in a twinkling and the sun shone with the same splendor as before. It was a sample of the odd weather one is liable to encounter in the Northwest.

No Indians showed themselves during the day, though it was likely that more than one of the dusky natives peered stealthily out from cover, with feelings akin to those of the islanders when they first saw the caravels of Columbus. An hour or so of daylight remained when Jack Murfree turned to the right bank, and, carefully feeling his way as far as it was safe, swung the anchor to land, which was within easy leaping distance.

He had been attentive to the engine throughout the day, making sure that the different parts were oiled and in good working condition. So far as he could see, everything was in perfect order, but he deemed it imprudent to go any further without a careful overhauling of the machinery.

Moreover, only a few sticks of wood remained, and it was necessary to take on board a new cargo. Fortunately it took but a short time to secure this.

While there was no means of settling the question to a nicety, it was agreed that when they halted to wood up, they were at least a hundred miles above Bison Rapids. The steamer had been going for fully fifteen hours, with an average speed of about seven miles.

This progress was encouraging. A goodly portion of Wild Cat Creek was behind them, and, if all went well, three days would see them at the end of their journey.

The understanding was that they should kindle a fire, cook their meal on shore, and then anchor in midstream. When this was done, and one of their number maintained guard, it was almost impossible for a treacherous enemy to get the better of them.

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

Hugh and Jack had leaped ashore, and Burden had his foot on the gunwale with the purpose of following them, when he stopped short, with the exclamation. As his friends turned their heads to learn the cause, they saw him with his Winchester at his shoulder and pointed at some object to the left and a little way up stream.

A mountain antelope had come out of the wood, and ascending a small ridge, stood on the crest, with head high in air, staring at the steamer and little party with that intense curiosity that has often proved fatal to its species. Instead of darting off on first catching sight of the men, the timid creature, which certainly had never before seen an animal that walked naturally on two legs, stood transfixed with astonishment.

Our friends were in need of fresh meat, and the distance was so trifling that when Baldy Burden pulled the trigger the antelope made only one frantic leap into the air, when he fell to the ground dead. Running forward, the hunter soon had the choicest portions cut away, washed and prepared for the glowing coals. Doubtless, the food would have been more palatable had it not been quite so fresh, but seasoned with salt and pepper, the crisp, juicy venison, united with light bread and fragrant coffee, made a meal which could not have been improved.

A painstaking examination failed to show anything the matter with the machinery. Jack Murfree had "humored" the engine, by holding it at moderate speed, and by making sure every joint was kept well oiled. He watched the working of the parts with the skilled attention of the professional engineer, and had his reward in ending the day with everything in prime condition.

When the steamer had been shoved out into midstream and anchored, the three friends grouped near each other at the stern, and while they smoked, talked in low tones.

"Matters have gone a good deal better than any of us dared to hope," remarked Jack, who was puffing the last cigar in his possession; "and we have all done a good deal of thinking. You have noticed that Wild Cat Fork is one of the crookedest rivers that we ever struck."

"The country is full of sich," replied Hugh, "but this is a little the worst I ever sot eyes on."

"Following the course of the river, it is three hundred miles to Dead Man's Mine; how far is it as the crow flies?"

"Not more than a hundred."

"And in that fact lies our danger."

"How's that?"

Jack now outlined the plan which they had fixed upon while ascending the Yellowstone.

"We are to go as near the mine as is prudent with the boat, which we are to do our best to hide, while we push ahead on foot. Then, when we've got enough gold to satisfy us, we are to put it on the boat and make all speed down stream."

"That's the idea exactly, Jersey; what are you kicking about?"

"If the Indians should start to follow us in their canoes, we shouldn't have

any trouble in running away from them, but, knowing the many windings of the river, as they do, what is to prevent them from cutting across country and heading us off?"

With all their woodcraft, neither Hugh nor Burden had thought of this. Still, when they came to discuss it and its bearings, it did not seem formidable. Suppose the Indians did summon enough courage to hurry across country, so as to place themselves in front of the Mountain Star, what of it? They could not check the craft when rushing at full speed down stream, and if any of their canoes got in the way of the flying steamer, it would be bad for the canoes.

Jack Murfree seemed to have thought of every possible phase of the question.

"You have told me that old Jeff Bagstock, who gave you our chart, didn't know a letter of the alphabet; all the wild Indians are equally ignorant; consequently some other white man made the lines and letters on this paper."

"Wal, what of *that*?"

"It means that we are not the only white men engaged in trying to get away with the gold in Dead Man's Mine."

CHAPTER X.—JAKE KASSON, THE SQUAW MAN.

THAT night, Montana Hugh acted as sentinel from midnight until four o'clock in the morning. He assumed his favorite position, which was seated on the covered space at the prow, with his back against the pile of wood, his feet extended, his Winchester lying across his knees, within instant reach, while he deliberately smoked his brier wood pipe.

His long experience and training enabled him to remain awake or fall asleep, as he chose, and under the circumstances, of course, he decided to keep awake.

Something like an hour passed, during which the impressive stillness was unbroken by the slightest sound, while his senses were on the alert. The Mountain Star had anchored in so smooth a portion of the river that the myriads of reflected stars looked as brilliant and motionless as those that gleamed in the dark vault overhead. He and the boat seemed to be suspended in midair, with the wonderful worlds on all sides.

Suddenly the keen eyes noticed a contortion and dancing of a number of the fiery points showing in the water directly ahead of the steamer. The cause was self evident; some object had disturbed the water. While the hunter was peering up stream, he caught the soft ripple of a paddle, and the next moment dimly made out the form of a canoe, stealthily approaching in the gloom.

"That's queer," was his thought; "we haven't had any reason to think the Injins had pluck enough to come near this craft."

By way of testing the courage of the stranger or strangers, he would have pulled the whistle cord had he not recalled that there was no steam in the boiler, and the Mountain Star perforce must remain mute.

The hunter closed his fingers around the weapon on his lap, and never once removed his eyes from the boat which was stealthily edging toward him. It

was possible that others were approaching from different points, but he chose to concentrate his attention on this one, believing that his sense of hearing would notify him in time to check the hostile advance of other craft.

A minute later, he was able to perceive that the canoe had but a single occupant, who was manipulating his long ashen paddle with a delicacy that made his approach almost imperceptible. The man took a diagonal course, which carried him a little way to one side, and then, as if his hesitation was at an end, he sent the frail craft so swiftly forward that it rounded to alongside the bow of the steamer.

The position of Hugh, with his back against the pile of wood, screened him from the sight of the other until this moment. Seeing that he meant to board the larger boat, the hunter called in a suppressed voice :

"Helloa there ; what do you want?"

"Helloa yourself!" was the response of the stranger, as he swung one leg over the gunwale and stepped aboard.

His voice and dress showed he was not an Indian but a white man. He was fully six feet tall, massive and powerful, and as he came up, placing his canoe so that it would not drift away, he held a formidable rifle in his hand.

"Jake Kasson, or I'm a sinner!" exclaimed Hugh, rising quickly to his feet and extending his hand in greeting.

"Montana Hugh, or you may skulp me!" replied the other equally surprised, though it would be hard to say whether the pleasure expressed was false or genuine.

It was several years since Hugh Hartley had met Jake Kasson, when on one of his trapping expeditions into the Northwest. He did not like Kasson, for there was reason to believe he had been mixed up in several shady occurrences, and in a quarrel shot a man who had been his comrade for years.

Withdrawing from his people, Kasson had become a squaw man ; that is, he married an Indian woman and made his home with her people. The disquieting fact about this step was that he affiliated with the Wusserman branch of the Sioux, who were not only among the fiercest branches of that warlike people, whose hostility to white men was implacable, but they lived in the immediate neighborhood of Dead Man's Mine, and it was they who had guarded the golden treasure up to this time with such vigilance that all attempts to take it away had been fatal failures.

All the same, the two sat down side by side, like long parted brothers, Kasson produced his pipe and lit it from the glowing bowl of Hugh, and they talked long and pleasantly in low tones, so as not to disturb the sleepers.

"I started for Fort Walling," explained the squaw man ; " 'bout once a year I get a hankering to see some of my own people, and I visit some post and stay a few days. You can just bet I could hardly b'lieve my eyes when they lit on a reg'lar steamer in Wild Cat Fork above Bison Rapids."

"Nat'rally, for this must be the first craft of the kind that ever shoved its nose into this part of the world."

"I s'pose you lifted it by balloon over the rapids."

"We'd have been glad to do so, but it was harder work than that," and Hugh gave a brief account of how the thing was done.

"You see," he added, "it struck me and my two friends, that you hear snoring sweetly back of us, that if the Yallerstone steamer could pick up so many furs and peltries along the bank, we might do still better by pushing right into the heart of the Injin country."

"Them words do have a sensible sound; there are thousands of dollars worth of pelts among the Wussermans, which you know is my people, and you can't persuade 'em to tote the stuff down the river to the Yallerstone and sell it to the trading steamers; but," added the squaw man impressively, "I'm afeard, Hugh, you've lost sight of a thing that has a good deal to do with this bus'ness."

"What's that?"

"The Wussermans are p'ison; they hate our breed worse nor rattlesnakes."

"I've heerd as much, but they don't gather peltries for the fun of the thing; how do they barter 'em off?"

"They have a way of their own, which is powerful qu'ar, but it's like an Injin; they used to sell the skins to a party of Hudson Bay trappers, who come down to the gorge in the mountains, 'bout fifty miles north of the Wusserman village; they don't hate a British hunter like they do an American, 'cause they've been told that it was us Americans that stole their hunting grounds away from 'em."

"And they ain't fur off the track; but how do they get rid of their pelts now?"

"Wal, so far as I can larn, they don't git rid of 'em, though it's to be expected they'll find some way of doing it afore long."

"If we go among them, with our trinkets and stuff, and treat them white, they will be glad, I'm sartin, to trade with us."

"I ain't so sure of it."

"Wal, we'll have to take our chances; there be three of us, and we ain't babes at the bus'ness, and I reckon we know how to use our guns when there's call to do so."

"What do you three amount to against more than four hundred warriors and squaws?" asked Kasson contemptuously; "they'll swaller you whole."

"I s'pose if things look too squally, we can turn tail and run; when we put full steam on this craft, there ain't an Injin canoe that can overhaul us."

"But an Injin bullet can," was the suggestive comment.

"Likewise the same will be the case when we take a shot at them."

"Wal, Hugh, you can do as you choose, of course, but if you'll take my advice, you'll turn about in the morning and not stop till you reach the Yellerstone."

"We might have done that had we received your advice sooner," replied Hugh Hartley, whose words were insincere, since he would have done nothing of the kind; "but having made a start, my friends wouldn't be willing to give up without making more of a trial than they've done."

"Depend upon it, you'll never get out of the country alive."

"We've all got to pass in our checks sooner or later, and what's the odds when we do it? Howsumever, we're 'bliged to you all the same, and when you get to Fort Walling give us a thought now and then."

"But I ain't going to Fort Walling," was the astounding reply; "I'm going to stick with you to the end."

CHAPTER XI.—A SUSPICIOUS PROCEEDING.

HERE was an exasperating complication on the threshold of the enterprise. Hugh Hartley and his companions held not a particle of faith in the squaw man Jake Kasson, and they did not doubt that his change of plan augured ill for them. He intended to return to his adopted people and assist them, not only in defeating the scheme of the three men, but in adding them to the long list of victims that had gone before.

When Jack Murfree learned that Kasson possessed a fair education, despite his uncouth language, he suspected it was he who had placed the lines and letters on the chart which was the cause of this singular voyage into the wilds of the Northwest.

The theory suggested more than one question that was hard to answer, for it was impossible to explain how it had fallen into the possession of old Jeff Bagstock and why it should ever have been made at all. As to the latter question, Jack Murfree's theory was not without probability. It was that Kasson and Bagstock were partners, who had arranged to remove the gold, but a quarrel or attempted treachery on the part of the squaw man led to the flight of Bagstock, who would have completed his plans for a return had his life been spared.

But there was no way of ridding themselves of the company of Kasson. Not only that, but the three were forced to play the hypocrite up to the limit and pretend they were pleased with his company.

"With you to interdooce us like," grinned Hugh; "and explainify that we ain't after nothing but trade, the Injins will load this ere craft to its gunwales with their furs, and we shall make enough, Jake, to give you a present as will amount to something."

"Oh, I ain't looking for nothing of that sort; what I do is out of friendship; there ain't nothing mean 'bout me."

"And you see," struck in Burden with another grin, which he managed to screw out of his countenance; "we're all single men and we may foller your example and pick out some likely squaw to sarve for a wife."

"My wife has been dead two years."

"Ain't you going to take another?"

"There's no hurry 'bout it," replied Kasson loftily; "so long as I let a dozen of 'em think they've got a chance with me, you see I'm solid."

Some time later the four men went ashore and had breakfast. Then Kasson tied his canoe to the stern of the steamer, which speedily resumed her voyage up Wild Cat Fork, their passenger showing much interest in the working of the small engine.

Not one of the party made the slightest reference to Dead Man's Mine. For our three friends to have done so would have revealed their whole scheme to the very man whom of all others they wished to keep it from, and had he mentioned it, it would have shown he was suspicious, which most likely was

what he was anxious to avoid seeming. And so the grim comedy was played out to the end.

Uncertain whether he was doing a wise thing or not, Jack Murfree pushed the Mountain Star to the best performance that was safe. He didn't know whether it was prudent to hasten their voyage or not, and so he took chances and hastened it. If ignominious failure was awaiting them, the sooner it came the better.

The smoke of several campfires was observed during the day, but the Indians themselves kept out of sight. The afternoon was half gone, when Kasson, who was seated at the front of the boat smoking and talking with Hugh Hartley, suddenly said in his abrupt manner :

"Skulp me ; but I've changed my mind !"

The three looked at him for an explanation of his meaning.

"I'm going to Fort Walling after all ; I forgot I promised to meet two old friends there ; it won't do to disapp'int them ; Jake Kasson always keeps his word."

This decision would have been most welcome, could our friends have believed its honesty, but each suspected there was treachery behind it. Nevertheless, it was a relief to learn they were to be rid of the company of the man whom all detested.

"It's a pity you didn't recall this before," remarked Jack Murfree with well pretended sympathy ; "it would have saved you a good many miles of paddling."

"Oh, that's nothing," airily replied Kasson ; "it's easy to paddle with the stream, and I can take my time returning ; I hope you'll be careful in your dealings with the Wussermans, for they are suspicious."

"We shall not forget the advice you have given us."

The parting was unceremonial. Kasson stepped over the gunwale into his canoe, laid down his rifle, lifted his paddle and calling "good by!" sent the boat skimming over the water with a speed which soon carried him out of sight around a bend in the stream.

"Quick!" said Hugh, with more excitement than he often showed ; "turn into shore, Jersey, and let me land."

Without waiting to ask the cause for this strange request, Jack Murfree did as desired, making a sharp turn to the right. The moment he was near enough to the shore for Hugh to leap, he did so.

"Now, go up stream slow like," he said, "and wait for me round the next bend."

Despite his woodcraft, Montana Hugh came near spoiling everything by his haste. He suspected the meaning of the apparent change of intention on the part of the squaw man and did not mean that he should escape him.

Picking his way through the wood and undergrowth and around the boulders and rocks, the veteran soon passed below the bend, which had veiled Kasson from sight. Peering out upon the river, he saw nothing of the canoe, which could not have disappeared as soon as this had its occupant paddled directly down the river.

A rustling of the undergrowth within a couple of rods of where the hunter

was moving cautiously gave notice that the squaw man was much nearer than he had suspected. In fact, he was paddling his boat up stream, but keeping close under the bank, where the overhanging limbs hid him from the sight of any one on the river.

Montana Hugh was accustomed to this kind of work, and, lying flat on the ground, he silently waited for Kasson to pass. He caught a glimpse of the massive shoulders and the bushy head surmounted by a fur cap, as, partly using his paddle and hands, he kept the canoe moving with greater speed than would be supposed.

When the rustling could be heard no longer, Hugh rose to a crouching posture and followed, pausing when the faint disturbance warned him he was approaching too close. Soon the most attentive listening failed to detect any sound. The cause was apparent; Kasson had stopped the progress of his boat. Extended flat on his face, Hugh applied his ear to the ground. The soft, almost inaudible tremors that came through the earth warned him that some one was guardedly walking near him.

Hugh drew his revolver.

"If he sees me," was his thought, "he will know that I am onto him, as I know he's been onto me from the first; then we'll have to fight it out."

But although Jake Kasson passed close to that crouching figure in the underbrush, he saw nothing of it. He kept straight on, and was quickly lost to sight.

Hugh made his way softly to where the canoe had been left. He saw that it was drawn high up the bank, as if to be safe against the rise of the stream, and the long ashen paddle was all that remained with it.

"He expects to be gone a good while," mused the hunter, with a compression of his thin lips and a flash of his gray eyes; "more than likely he'll never come back after that ere boat. He go to Fort Walling! Just as much as I'll go there."

He spent half an hour in hunting for the squaw man. He even took his trail and cautiously traced it for a short distance, but he saw nothing more of him, nor did he expect to do so.

When he made his way up stream to where the Mountain Star was waiting for him, he explained his singular action.

"That scamp has headed for the Wusserman villages; he knows a short cut that'll take him there sooner than we can reach it with this boat; when we arrive, he'll be waiting fur us, and then the band will begin to play."

CHAPTER XII.—INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH.

It seemed singular that Jake Kasson, the squaw man, could beat the swift steamer in reaching the Indian village, but neither Jack Murfree nor Burden Burnett doubted the declaration of Montana Hugh.

The man had remained on board the boat until he had picked up the information desired, and he had been carried to a point where it was only a comparatively short tramp across the country, while the Mountain Star would have to journey two or three times as far in order to reach the same point.

A slight diminution in the breadth of Wild Cat Fork was perceptible. A stream of considerable size flowed in from the west, tumbling over the rocks and sending the spray high in the air, and despite the young captain's vigilance, he twice narrowly missed running the boat against a submerged rock. He trembled when he heard the weak hull scrape past, and resolved to be more careful, even at the sacrifice of speed.

Again the smoke of several camp fires were noticed on different sides of the stream. Hugh and Burden, after studying a couple of them, agreed that they were signal fires. It was almost certain that the passage of the steamer was being telegraphed from point to point by the red men, who frequently send news for hundreds of miles in that manner.

It was decided that more than half the journey was completed. Captain Jack insisted that they had traveled two hundred miles, but the veterans believed it somewhat less.

The stock of wood was low, when, as the sun sank in the sky they approached another of the canyons that had threatened more than once to bar their way. The one before them was less than a hundred feet in width, while the gray walls of limestone arose on either hand to a height three times as great. The sides were rough, jagged and perpendicular, as if at some remote period in the world's history the mountain had been split asunder by a convulsion of nature and the way opened for the rush of this stream to the Yellowstone, far to the southward. No doubt the torrent was very deep, for its velocity was markedly less than in the other passage which brought the Mountain Star for a time to a standstill.

There was no fear that the steamer could not force her way through this canyon, but to prevent delay Jack lingered in the calmer water until the boiler was blowing off steam, when he headed for the gorge and darted into the passage with a speed that sent the spray and water flying high in air.

The passage was a hundred and fifty yards from end to end, and the moment it was entered Captain Jack saw that it could be readily forced.

Hugh Hartley was holding his favorite position at the prow. Unlike his companions, he did not look in advance, but up at the tops of the mountainous walls towering on both sides of him. He studied them with a closeness of scrutiny that interested Jack Murfree, who noted his action, since he was in his direct line of vision.

The young man was on the point of questioning him, when he noticed that the bronzed face of the veteran hunter was pale and drawn. He saw him swallow, as a person will do, when distressed. Then he abruptly lowered his gaze, and seeing the captain looking at him, pointed upward.

Jack followed the direction indicated. Straight aloft he peered and saw what he had noticed before, that several of the masses of rock seemed so delicately poised on the edge of the canyon that a child could shove them over; but probably they had stood thus for ages and would stand for ages to come.

But as the captain looked, he discovered what at first looked like three or four crows peering over the edge of the canyon. A second glance showed them to be the heads of Indians, peering down upon the little steamer.

It was easy to guess what this meant. They had arranged to topple over one of the enormous masses of stone upon the boat, crushing and burying it and the three men forever from human sight.

Noting the strained expression on the face of Montana Hugh, Jack Murfree nodded to signify he understood the cause of his emotion.

It was easy to steer the craft, while peering aloft, for all Jack had to do was to hold the wheel stationary. If it had been arranged to roll one of those masses of stone over into the canyon, it would take quick dodging to escape it.

Baldy Burden had also noted the terrifying situation, and his Winchester was at his shoulder and pointed upward. Strange that not one of the three men uttered a word. All the sounds heard were the quick, panting throbs of the engine and the splash of the screw as it did its work.

Just as Baldy's finger was pressing the trigger, the hideous countenance at which he was aiming was withdrawn. But he guessed where it would reappear, and he made no mistake. The painted visage, with the coarse, black hair dangling about and over it, was abruptly thrust forward as if there was nothing to fear from the men who had steamed into the fatal trap.

Above the sounds described echoed the crack of Baldy Burden's Winchester. The reckless redskin had thrust himself too far forward in his indifference to the peril, and, as his bronzed skull was bored through by the leaden bullet, he emitted a rasping screech and dived forward over the edge of the canyon.

It was a frightful picture, as the half clothed figure, one hand grasping his rifle, his black hair flying about his shoulders, and his legs sprawled far apart, shot down the abyss, turning over and over, as if he had leaped from a springboard, and striking the water with a resounding splash, within a dozen feet of the prow of the steamer, passed out of sight as if he were a stone.

Still no one spoke. Jack Murfree paid no attention to the human figure spinning down the abyss, but was seeking to learn which rock it was intended to tumble upon them; for there were three at least that would serve, one of which was on the opposite side of the canyon from the other two.

It might be that this preliminary dallying was meant to deceive the white men, who in the attempt to escape would place the boat precisely where it needed to be placed in order to be crushed to nothingness.

"That's the one!" called Hugh, pointing to a mass which projected over the edge of the canyon.

Jack had observed the suspicious action of the dusky figures that were swarming like so many ants around it. Like a flash, he headed the boat toward the other side of the canyon, where she would be directly under the third rock, if it was intended to precipitate that into the abyss.

But he and Hugh were right, and the Mountain Star swerved out of the way just as the immense rock, that must have weighed a hundred tons, dived over the edge of the abyss and sped downward like a terrific meteor hurled from the heavens. It was a terrifying picture, as the vast, dark body sped earthward with inconceivable momentum, capable of crushing to fragments anything in its path.

Plunging toward the right of the Mountain Star, it made for the bottom of the passage with increasing velocity. Striking the water with a force beyond the power of imagination to conceive, it sent the spray half way to the top, while the waves that spun outward from the frightful chasm made for the instant by the descent of the mass of stone were like those in the Whirlpool Rapids below Niagara. They shot toward all points of the compass, rebounding from the rocky walls on both sides of the canyon and catching the steamer, tossed her aloft as if she were an eggshell.

For a moment Jack Murfree thought the boat would be crushed by the violence with which it was driven to one side; but the same remarkably good fortune that had thus far attended them, intervened to save the Mountain Star for the still more terrible adventures that awaited her.

A few brief moments later the diminutive steamer glided through the canyon into the smooth waters above, where nothing more was to be feared of the nature from which she had just escaped, by "the skin of her teeth."

CHAPTER XIII.—THE END OF THE VOYAGE.

THE tremendous attack upon the steamer, in passing through the canyon gave the adventurers a more vivid idea than they had yet felt of the desperate character of their undertaking. They had started with the ostensible purpose of making a trading venture with the Indians around the headwaters of Wild Cat Fork, and, before they could make known their purpose, the red men put forth every effort to kill the whole trio.

That these enemies belonged to the Wusserman branch of the mighty Sioux was declared to be beyond all doubt by Hugh Hartley and Burden Burnett, both of whom had seen the people on their trapping expeditions in the Northwest, and were acquainted with their dress and general appearance. In truth, Hugh, who had a special aptitude for picking up Indian tongues, was able to understand and speak the dialect of these warlike people.

But matters being as they had proved to be, how in the name of common sense were our friends to open trade with them? And if they could not open trade with them, what was to be accomplished by the enterprise itself.

When it became too dark to continue the voyage, the three men, having carefully picked out a landing place, where they felt secure from detection, talked long and earnestly over the grave problem. They had eaten their supper, extinguished the fire with which they did the cooking, lest it should attract attention, and now smoked their pipes, while talking and listening.

"Did you see anything of the squaw man among the party who tried to drop that pebble upon our heads?" asked Jack Murfree.

"Not a sign; I don't know whether he is there, but, if he is, he took care not to let us catch sight of him; he'll be among the varmints at their main village soon enough to give 'em notice of our coming."

"What impresses me," continued Jack, "is that these Indians don't seem to hold the Mountain Star in fear; likely enough they will come out into the river in their canoes and attack us. This craft wasn't intended to serve as a man of war."

"I don't see but one thing to do, if they try that trick," said Baldy.

"What's that?"

"Turn tail and run; if we can keep clear of the rocks while tearing down stream, none of their blamed canoes can catch us, and we'll soon leave 'em so far behind that they'll give up the job."

"I don't look upon that as certain; as Hugh has explained, the course of this river is so winding that a big party of them could cut across the country and head us off. Then, too, we can't keep up our flight at night; if we undertook it, disaster would be quick and overwhelming."

Fearing that his words might sound too pessimistic, the young captain hastened to add:

"All that has been thought of before, and it may be said that we knew we should have to count upon the enmity of the Sioux before we bought the Mountain Star in St. Louis. What puzzles me is how we are to get the first chance at that gold, now that Jake Kasson has gone on ahead to warn the Wussermans of our coming. It was bad enough before; now it couldn't be any worse."

"It ain't so bad as you think," quietly remarked Montana Hugh; "in the first place, tomorrer must end our v'yage in this puffer."

"How is that?"

"We're nearer Dead Man's Mine than any of us thought; that fight in the kenyon proves that; tomorrer we'll git so near that it won't do to try to use the boat any longer."

"What shall we do with it?"

"We've got to find some place where we can hide it, and where the Injins ain't likely to tumble over it. Then we must do the rest of the bus'ness on foot."

This was a new phase of the enterprise, but it impressed Jack Murfree favorably. By concealing the steamer in some creek or tributary, where it could be well hidden by the overhanging vegetation, they would establish their headquarters or base, as it might be considered. If obliged to retreat, they could stealthily pick their way through the solitude to the place, hurriedly fire up, and then make a dash for their lives.

An exasperating feature of this curious business was that not one of the three had been able to gain the first atom of definite knowledge of the nature of Dead Man's Mine. Whether it was an excavation in the river bank or among the mountains, where placer mining could be carried on; whether it was the forsaken bed of some river into which the torrent had brought and deposited many nuggets of gold, as is the case in the Klondike, or whether the precious metal existed in some other form of deposit, our friends could only conjecture. The most favorable view they could take of it held out little hope of their prosecuting their work, after the jealous Wussermans were warned by the squaw man. None the less, the three resolutely pushed on into the dangerous region.

The Mountain Star had secured such a fine place under the bank where it was nestled out of sight, that the three decided to remain there for the night. The fire under the boiler had been extinguished long before, and there was

nothing about the craft to betray its presence to an enemy. While two of the men, therefore, stretched out on the ground, the third kept watch, taking turns with the others, so that the task did not become onerous to any of them.

Nothing was seen or heard of the Indians, the night passing without incident; but the morning brought anything but an agreeable change. The sun was veiled by clouds which soon began to shed rain. In a short time, there was a steady downpour, which continued without intermission until the latter part of the day, when the clearing was only partial.

The rain was cold, chilly and penetrating, and the situation of our friends could not have been more dismal. The canvas kept the boat comparatively dry, and their thick blankets were a good protection, but the never ending drizzle, the eternal dripping from the leaves and branches, the pattering on the misty river beyond, which was mostly hidden from view by a white penetrating fog; these were features of the situation that were enough to depress the spirits of the most buoyant man.

Added to all this, was the fact that it was necessary to maintain constant watch, more vigilant, if possible, than during the night. While it looked as if the Indians had not discovered the hiding place of the steamer, it was not certain that such was the fact. It was not impossible that they had located it and were laying cunning plans for the destruction of itself and owners, who kept a fire under the boiler until the afternoon was well gone, when the screw was set to revolving at a moderate rate, and the craft headed out into mid-stream.

The penetrating vision failed to discover the first sign of the presence of their enemies, but there was little doubt that they were in the neighborhood. Feeling its way as best it could, the steamer, at considerable risk, crept up the river for several miles. A bump against the bottom warned Jack Murfree that this was too dangerous, and the anchor was dropped, without approaching land.

To the astonishment of all three, no attack or demonstration was made through the night, which was so densely dark that the men had to depend wholly upon their sense of hearing to apprise them of the approach of peril. Not a star was visible. Captain Jack noiselessly dropped several hundred feet down stream, with a view of puzzling their enemies if they searched for them, but it looked as if the precaution was unnecessary.

The morning dawned clear and crisp. Again the Mountain Star plowed her way through the current with moderate speed. Several difficult passages were forced, and the stream narrowed more than at any time previous. Montana Hugh said with quiet emphasis, as the afternoon drew to a close:

"We can go no further with this ere craft; she's done all she can do for us. Now, if we kin find a hiding place for the thing, we'll leave her and strike into the woods."

CHAPTER XIV.—AMONG THE SHADOWS.

ALTHOUGH no direct evidence of the fact had presented itself, Montana Hugh was certain they were in the immediate vicinity of the Sioux village, and

consequently near Dead Man's Mine, which was their real destination. His conviction was so clear on that point that his companions shared it and the line of action was arranged accordingly.

With a moderate head of steam, the Mountain Star moved slowly up stream until night had fully descended. No moon was in the sky, though a half orb would rise some time after midnight. The countless stars gleamed in the dark vault overhead with the same brilliant splendor as before and were reflected in the placid surface of Wild Cat Fork.

While Jack Murfree stood at the wheel, keenly watching and listening, like his companions, he softly veered the prow of the boat toward the left bank. Without pausing or touching land, he passed nigh enough for Hugh to leap ashore. He did this silently and instantly disappeared in the gloom, while the steamer sheered off again toward mid stream. She puffed softly and a few sparks were thrown off from the slender smoke stack. Thus, any one standing on either bank could easily locate the boat, even though it were hidden from sight in the gloom.

Steam being shut off, the anchor was not lowered. The craft began drifting with the current, floating as noiselessly as a shadow. Burden Burnett stood at the front with a long pole while Jack Murfree, withdrawing his attention from the idle engine, was stationed at the stern with another pole. Their business was to keep the steamer in the middle of the river, should the current carry it toward either bank.

Eyes and ears were strained, not so much to catch the first sign of danger, as to hear an expected signal from their friend whom they had put ashore. Still the boat continued to drift, until fully a fourth of a mile was passed. Only once had Burden made use of the pole in his grasp, and then only for an instant.

Suddenly a soft tremulous whistle, like the call of a bird reached their ears from the left bank, a short distance down stream. It was the expected signal from Montana Hugh.

Instantly the two men on the boat pressed the poles against the bottom on the right, and began working the craft toward the opposite bank. The work was comparatively easy, and the steamer steadily approached shore until the overhanging limbs brushed the pile of wood with which it was laden.

"Let me have the end of your pole," called Hugh in a guarded voice from the darkness on shore. Jack extended the pole, which was grasped by the hunter, who pulled with such force that the steamer was quickly drawn nigh enough for him to spring aboard.

"This is the place," he said, and groping around until he had found a third pole, he gave his efforts toward impelling the craft into the narrow creek which flowed into Wild Cat Fork.

In the gloom, eyes were of little use to any of the party, and the task proved a serious one, but they persevered until they had ascended the tributary for perhaps two hundred yards. Then, with some difficulty, they succeeded in turning the boat so that it headed down stream, ready to make a dash should the necessity arise.

The steamer and its occupants were so effectually screened that Jack

Murfree did not hesitate to light a resinous knot, and, holding it above his head, survey their surroundings.

The creek which they had ascended in this guarded manner was barely wide enough to permit the craft to turn around. While doing so, the dense, overhanging vegetation brushed the front and stern. Instead of dropping the anchor, Jack tied a thin rope to the limb of a tree, the gentle current rippling softly about the boat, the like of which had never before disturbed those waters.

This course was adopted, as the reader has understood, with a view of concealing the Mountain Star from their enemies. Doubtless many of them were stealthily watching the progress of the gruesome looking craft up stream, and, having seen it come to rest, would naturally expect it to remain until morning in the same spot. If Jack Kasson, the squaw man, was with the Wussermans, as most likely was the case, he would arrange for an attack upon the craft when he had reason to think most of the crew were asleep. Therefore, nothing could be more prudent than to have the object of his attack somewhere else when the blow was struck.

A critical point had been reached in the venture of our friends. Should they be compelled to leave the spot, they could either make a dash down the creek into the river, or quietly pole or drift thither, while steam was being gotten up. Then the way would be open for the race for life.

"You will stay here," said Hugh, as the three grouped together for a few guarded words before separating. The suggestion was to Jack Murfree, who had been told the same thing before.

"I understand that; I will remain with the steamer and hold myself ready to get under way on the shortest possible notice."

"And there's no saying how short it will be; you may never receive the notice at all," Hugh added gravely.

"Possibly, but I hope for better things."

"Baldy and me take different routes to hunt for Dead Man's Mine or the Injin village, which is 'bout the same thing. We oughter find it afore to-morrer night; if you choose you can wait fur three days——"

"I'll wait a week."

"No, you won't; if neither me nor Baldy shows up at the end of three days, you'll know we've slid under and gone to keep company with the other folks that set out to diskiver Dead Man's Mine. In that case, you'll have to run the Mountain Star to Bison Rapids without any help from Baldy or me."

"My idee is," said Burden, "that if neither Hugh nor me shows up by to-morrer night, it'll be 'cause we've struck our last sickness."

"I shan't accept that as proof," Jack Murfree calmly replied; "you are both acting on the theory that we are close to the Indian village or Dead Man's Mine, whereas it may be a number of miles away. In that case, you will need more time, and you may depend that I shan't leave until absolutely all hope is gone."

"There's another thing to be thought of," said Hugh; "some of the varmints may tumble upon this boat."

"In that case it will be my last sickness instead of yours; there won't be an earthly chance of my getting away."

"Wall, I guess we understand matters as far as we kin," added Hugh, "and we may as well make a start. I'll foller the bank of the stream, as far up toward the mountains as seems right, while you, Baldy, will strike inland and see what you kin see. If either of us finds out anything, we'll try to reach the other by signals; if we can't work that—and I don't believe we kin—we'll try to meet here at night and agree on what we shall do next."

Without any more leave taking, the veterans left the steamer, each taking a different course, so that at the end of a few minutes all three were entirely lost to one another, though still able to communicate by signal, should it become necessary.

Following the course agreed upon, Montana Hugh threaded his way through the undergrowth, keeping close to the upper bank of the tributary until he reached its point of junction with the main stream. There he paused, as was proper, while he carefully thought over the best course to pursue.

It will be noted that he and his comrade were acting on the theory that the Dead Man's Mine was on the left bank of Wild Cat Fork. This line of action was based upon no actual knowledge, and was likely to be wrong, in which event it would be necessary for them to cross the river.

The keen ear caught the soft ripple of a paddle. Instantly Hugh sank down on his face so as to gain a partial view of the calmly flowing stream in front. As he did so, he discerned the faint shadowy form of an Indian canoe, filled with braves, which skimmed almost noiselessly down stream, quickly followed by another and still another until the hunter had counted seven.

"They're looking fur the steamer," was the rightful conclusion of Montana Hugh; "and I wonder if they'll find it."

CHAPTER XV.—A STARTLING FIND.

THE hardest work for a person placed in the situation of Jack Murfree is to do nothing, but to sit idle and wait for he knows not what. When the young man found himself alone, he adopted the most sensible course before him. He wrapped his blanket about his body, and, lying down in the bottom of the boat in the open space set apart for such purposes, fell asleep.

The preceding three or four days had been hard for him, with his rest so broken that he was in need of recuperation, and, having once closed his eyes, he did not open them until the sun was again shining through the tree tops.

"I don't know whether Hugh or Baldy would have advised the course I took," he mused, as he sat up and rubbed his eyes; "but, since it has come out all right, it was the best thing to do. I am now slept out, and ready for any duty that may be required of me. Great Caesar! but I'm hungry enough to eat my boots."

It would have been the height of imprudence to kindle a fire, and the young man had no thought of doing so. It had been their custom from the first to keep a reserve supply of food, upon which he now drew for his morning meal. That finished, he made a closer survey of his surroundings.

There was little to add to what the glow of the pine knot had revealed on the preceding night. The creek was barely a dozen yards in width, and so

overhung with branches that a canoe could have passed underneath and remained securely hidden from any one paddling up or down stream. While the Mountain Star was too bulky thus to shrink from sight, it was not likely to be discovered by any one who did not approach nearer than a few rods. Since, too, the course of the creek was winding, the craft was invisible to any one passing up or down Wild Cat Fork.

It will be seen, therefore, that the boat was comparatively safe from discovery, provided the keen witted Sioux did not suspect the ruse played upon them and start a thorough search on foot. In such an event, to put it mildly, Jack Murfree's situation would become unpleasant.

His hope being that he would gain the opportunity to test the speed and helpfulness of the steamer, he made every preparation, with a view of being ready when the supreme necessity should arise.

The wood with which the furnace under the boiler was filled was so resinous that the touch of a match would set it ablaze, and produce steam in the boiler within ten or fifteen minutes. Then every portion of the machinery was cleaned and oiled, the bearings examined, and every precaution taken.

It had often occurred to Captain Jack that he was exposed to a peculiar danger. The firm which constructed the Mountain Star in St. Louis had never imagined the use to which it would be put. When, therefore, they provided a strong canvas covering as a protection for the crew and cargo, they deemed they had done enough. But the pilot at the wheel was in plain sight of any one on either bank, and nothing was easier than to pick him off with a stealthy rifle shot. Jack had often thought of this, and wondered that an attempt had not already been made upon his life.

Hugh and Baldy could readily protect themselves by means of the pile of wood, or by keeping their heads below the gunwales, but there was no such armor at the command of the skipper.

He now proceeded to remedy the neglect. He carefully adjusted the heaviest wood, so that it presented a bullet proof barrier on his right and left. It was necessary to keep the passage open at the front and rear, in order to watch the progress of the boat, and to steer with judgment, but there was no cause to hold any other portion of the river under surveillance.

It was with no little satisfaction that he contemplated his work when it was completed. The wooden walls rose to a height of six feet, permitting him to stand erect without exposure to any dusky sharpshooter, except when the prow of the boat should be turned directly toward or away from the shore.

This important task completed, it was not long before the young man found time monotonous and irksome. Surely nothing was to be gained by remaining where he was, and though the dangerous work of exploration was in the hands of Hugh and Burden, he decided to essay something of the kind for himself.

In taking this step, he did not become reckless. His course at first was that followed by Montana Hugh, leading him down the creek to the point of its junction with Wild Cat Fork. That reached, he hesitated to go further; but, carefully veiling his body against discovery, he peered out upon the stream, scanning the opposite bank and as far up and down stream as was possible.

For a time he was unable to perceive anything of interest. He noticed that the river made a sweeping curve to the right, a short way above the point where the Mountain Star had halted the night before. This shut off an extended view, but far beyond this point could be perceived the craggy, snow covered peak of a spur of the Rocky Mountains, thrown in relief against the sky like a mass of clouds tumbled against the horizon. From where he stood he could follow the white wastes downward with his eye, until pine trees and rocks began to appear, the snow growing less and finally vanishing altogether, to be succeeded by the rugged vegetation peculiar to those northern latitudes.

Studying the impressive scene, Jack soon became aware that not one but fully a score of bluish streaks were climbing lazily upward into the clear mountain air. The points from which these columns of smoke started were hidden by the intervening elevations, but he did not doubt their source.

"That is the smoke from the Wusserman lodges; Dead Man's Mine is within gunshot of the spot, though it cannot be told from where I stand whether they are on the right or left bank of the river."

It was a strong temptation to steal up the shore, until he could settle the question for himself, and, while no feeling of personal fear restrained him, he did not forget that such a course would be contrary to the instructions of Hugh and Baldy, and was likely to bring irretrievable disaster to the whole party.

"I haven't done much," he reflected, "but it is all I dare undertake; the only thing that remains is for me to go back to the boat and hold myself ready for instant call."

Of course he knew nothing of those seven shadowy canoes, laden with warriors, that Montana Hugh had seen dart down stream, in quest of the steamer, but Jack, not doubting that many of the Indians had watched the progress of the boat, was convinced that they would make search for it. Their most natural conclusion would be that it had passed down stream, frightened off by the perils that beset it; but among the red men were likely to be several who would suspect that the craft had not left the neighborhood, but was hiding somewhere near.

These and similar thoughts disturbed the young captain as he picked his way along the bank of the creek, often pausing and listening, rifle in hand, while he peered in every direction in quest of that which he dreaded to see.

He was within fifty paces of the steamer, when he started with fright and astonishment. He had seen something shining on the ground immediately in front of him, which, at first, he took to be a dead bird of brilliant plumage, but which the next moment he perceived was an Indian moccasin.

Contemplating it for a moment with breathless amazement, he stepped forward and picked it up. It was made of untanned buckskin, and its size showed that it must have belonged to a full grown warrior. It was considerably worn, and the upper part was ornamented with brilliantly colored beads, among which were interwoven bits of pure gold.

"What can be the meaning of that?" Jack Murfree asked himself, glancing furtively around him; "how the mischief could a warrior lose that from his foot without missing it, and why didn't he stop and put it on again?"

These were important questions, but the most important was the significance of the fact that the wearer of the moccasin had approached so near the hidden Mountain Star.

CHAPTER XVI.—WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

THE discovery of the Indian moccasin so near the boat sent a shiver through Jack Murfree, for he could not fail to attribute the most sinister meaning to it.

His first belief was that a party searching for the Mountain Star had found it, and that would mean destruction to the whole enterprise; but, naturally of a hopeful disposition, he was able, after some minutes' thought, to form a slight hope that, after all, such might not be the case.

The ground for this was that, standing where he had picked up the tell tale evidence, he was unable to see the boat. Not only that, it was not until he had taken several steps that he could discern the smoke stack and upper part of the wood piled upon the craft.

"If the warrior failed to go on up the bank and turned off here, it is probable he saw nothing of the boat; but did he take that course?"

The young man now attempted to do that which would have been easy for either of his companions or for an Indian himself. Stooping over, he carefully scrutinized the ground in the immediate vicinity. By patient study, he was able to distinguish the impression made by the foot of the red man with a result that was encouraging.

The trail, instead of following the course of the creek, veered to the right and away from it. The man had come from the direction of the river, but changed his line so as to pass to the northward and deeper into the wood. That much Jack learned, after nearly an hour of investigation, though he did not follow the faint footprints for more than a few rods.

The perplexing fact remained without explanation that an Indian warrior while tramping through the wood had "cast a shoe" and passed on without pausing to replace it on his foot. It must have been awkward thus to advance with one foot bare and unprotected, but that he had done so seemed certain.

Jack's next proceeding was to examine every part of the boat in quest of signs of a visit during his absence. He failed to find anything to cause misgiving in that respect, though he reflected that it would be natural for an Indian to content himself for a time in scrutinizing the craft without going on board.

The occurrence was of the most disquieting nature, and he debated a long time over the right course for him to follow, if, indeed, he could do anything at all. Once he thought it would be prudent to move the boat further up the creek and hide it in a new place, so far removed from the old that there would be difficulty in finding it again; but he decided that such a course at best could serve only a temporary purpose. If their enemies failed to find it at first, it would not take them long to locate it, and the further Jack was from the main stream, the more difficulty he would have in working the steamer back to it.

Another objection was that it would complicate matters with his friends. Nothing of the kind had been considered by them, and, if they failed to find the craft at the place where it had been left, they were likely to conclude it had departed from the neighborhood for good. Accordingly, no change was made in the location of the boat.

Jack Murfree, however, adopted one sensible precaution. Instead of remaining on the steamer, he took a position in the wood, several rods removed and beyond sight of it. If the Indians returned to it during the day or night, he could hear, if he could not see them, and he would have a chance to save himself, whereas, if they caught him on board, there would be no escaping the trap in which he was involved.

The long hours of the afternoon dragged slowly away. He had no appetite for food, and retained his place as sentinel, with the result that just as night was once more closing around him he received the second shock of alarm. Some one was on the *Mountain Star*!

Of that there could be no doubt, for he heard a stick of wood fall, as if displaced by the passage of a person. Then, in the profound stillness, he caught the soft, almost inaudible, footfall of a man making his way carefully from one end of the craft to the other. He listened for further evidence. There was no sound of voices, from which he believed that the single Indian who had lost the moccasin had returned, and was pursuing an investigation on his own account.

"That being the case, I'll take a hand myself," was his conclusion, as he began moving with the stealth of a phantom among the trees.

By this time the gloom was so deep that he saw nothing of the craft until almost close enough to touch it with outstretched hand. Pausing thus close, he observed the unmistakable outlines of a man, standing at the stern, partly hidden by the walls of wood which Jack himself had piled around the steering apparatus.

The attitude of the individual was that of listening, as if he had detected the stealthy approach of Jack, who, holding his rifle ready for instant use, called in a suppressed undertone:

"Helloa, there! What are you after?"

"I'm after you, you chump! Why ain't you here where you b'long?"

It was Baldy Burden who thus addressed him, and with a mountain of apprehension rolled from his shoulders, Jack stepped forward from the gloom and grasped the extended hand of his old friend.

"I was sure it was an Indian," was his explanation, "and was ready to take a shot at you."

"Do I look so much like one of the varmints?"

"Yes, in the darkness. Then, too, one Indian at least has been in this neighborhood since you left."

"How do you know that?"

Jack related the incident of finding the moccasin, which he handed to the hunter as proof of his words.

"That was qu'ar," was the comment of Baldy Burden; "but I've knowed such things to happen afore."

"What! Does an Indian care so little for his footgear that he won't pause to replace it if it slips off when he is walking?"

"The practice ain't a favorite one, but, as I said, it has happened afore, as I happen to know. I have picked up a Crow moccasin, and twice I've come onto them that had been left by Blackfeet. But it doesn't signerfy allers that the redskin that owned it has tramped off half barefoot."

"How is that?"

"When one of them people starts on a long tramp, he gin'rally takes an extra moccasin or two with him, the same as you done with some parts of this ere injine of yours; 'cause a moccasin slips off when walking, it's a good sign that it is purty well wore out, and is likely to slip off ag'in afore long. That means bother when the redskin is in a hurry, so instead of stooping to pick it up, he leaves it lay and slips on the other which he is carrying at his belt. I s'pose you noticed that this thing is purty well wore out?"

"I did, without thinking of the explanation you have given."

"Wal, you've got it straight now."

"And this particular Indian knows nothing about the Mountain Star?"

"Mind I don't say that; I'm hoping he doesn't, but it may be he diskivered the craft and went off to bring a whole lot of varmints to clean us out."

"We can only keep watch against their coming, then; but, Baldy, you haven't told me anything of what you did today."

"'Cause you haven't give me a chance. What I've been able to do don't amount to nothing at all; I hope Hugh has done better, but I fear he hasn't."

"Have you seen or heard nothing of him since you went away?"

"Nothing at all," said Baldy gloomily; "but I located the Injin village, which ain't a half mile up the river, on the left side. There are 'bout forty lodges, and I should say the Wussermans number five hundred warriors, squaws and younkens and papooses."

"What about Dead Man's Mine?"

"I don't know any more than you; I haven't been able to pick up the first glimmer of where it is, and have my doubts whether there's such a place, and that this whole bus'ness is a reg'lar wild goose chase."

"Everything will depend upon the report which Hugh brings back."

"What report can he bring? As for me, I don't b'lieve we shall ever see anything of Hugh ag'in."

"You went out and came back; isn't he as capable as you?"

"A blame sight more; I had a narrer squeak, but he took twice as much chances as me; if he doesn't show up purty soon, you can make sartin you won't ever see anything of him ag'in."

But the long night wore away and brought no sign of the absent Hugh Hartley.

CHAPTER XVII.—A MASTER OF WOODCRAFT.

MEANWHILE, Montana Hugh was engaged upon the most delicate and perilous duty of his life that was mostly made up of strange and dangerous adventure.

In a career which had taken him through the wildest solitudes of the Northwest and more than once into British territory, as well as into the land of the terrible Apache, he had become a consummate master of woodcraft, capable in a fair test of wits to outpoint the red man nearly every time. Baldy Burden was an expert at the same unique business, but he was not the equal of Montana Hugh.

One of the lessons the latter had early impressed upon him was the indispensable virtue of patience, and the danger of taking anything for granted in dealing with his dusky enemies.

He gave himself three days in which to complete his self appointed task, for he knew that the crisis would be met and passed by that time; and yet, strange as it may sound, he was by no means convinced that it would consume a less period. When it is borne in mind that the Sioux village was less than half a mile distant, this stint seems absurd, but Montana Hugh fully comprehended the nature of the work before him.

The yielding to impatience, even to the slightest extent, the assumption of a fact without the indubitable proof, or the relaxation of an eternal vigilance meant the most woful consequence to himself, the enterprise on which he was engaged, and to his companions.

Hugh's genius in the line of woodcraft had already manifested itself more than once. He instantly read the purpose of Jake Kasson, the squaw man, when he announced his intention of passing down Wild Cat Fork into the Yellowstone, and so on to Fort Walling. He knew, without being able to tell precisely how, when the Mountain Star had gone as far up stream as was safe, and he was right in concluding that the Sioux village was on the left bank of the river.

The gloomy legends brooding over the frontier regarding Dead Man's Mine indicated that the Wusserman tribe guarded it with unremitting vigilance. That vigilance was likely to be intensified by the return of Kasson with news that a steamer and three white men were pushing up Wild Cat Fork with the purpose of robbing the mine of a portion of its golden treasures.

And yet, in the face of these tremendous obstacles, Montana Hugh was hopeful that he could succeed in outwitting the guardians of the wealth.

It will be recalled that while Baldy Burden moved further back from the river, Hugh made his way down the creek to its bank, up which he began picking his way with an infinity of patience almost inconceivable. After noting the flight of the seven canoes down stream, it would be thought that it was safe for the veteran to move carefully but rapidly up the river until near the Indian village. In all probability such a course would have been safe; nevertheless, the gray light of morning was in the sky when he arrived at a point which enabled him to look down on the collection of tepees and lodges where the Wusserman branch of the Sioux made their homes.

He had left the river bank, and, circling to the left, reached the base of a large tree, which he climbed until near the top, and was well hidden by the luxuriant branches. He had secured a view point where nothing but his own carelessness could betray him to his enemies.

Placing himself astride of a limb and gently parting the twigs and leaves

in front of his face, just enough to permit him to peer out without being observed, he studied the interesting scene spread before him.

The Indian village, as has been stated by Baldy Burnett, contained some forty or fifty lodges, scattered irregularly over a space covering several acres. These lodges were made of furs, conical in shape, the framework consisting of a number of saplings with their bottoms far apart and their tops joined. At the junction of the sticks was an opening in the skins for the escape of the smoke when a fire was burning inside.

The Wussermans owned no ponies, but they had an abundance of dogs which trotted back and forth through the town, fought among themselves for the bones flung to them, or frolicked with the dusky, half clothed children. Most of the men lolled about, smoking long stemmed pipes, while their frowsy squaws attended to the manual labor. The Indians made no pretense of cultivating the ground, but secured their food by fishing and hunting.

Montana Hugh had looked upon similar scenes many times, and there was nothing specially attractive in what he now saw. He was eager, however, to inform himself upon two points. The first was whether Jake Kasson was really in the village, and the other was to gain some clue to the locality of Dead Man's Mine.

His curiosity on the first point was not settled until noon, when, looking beyond the village, he saw seven canoes suddenly shoot into view, and as they ran their noses up the bank, their occupants sprang out, and, making their way across the short, intervening space, scattered among the tepees. At the head of this party, numbering nearly two score, was the squaw man, who dived into one of the lodges and remained for more than an hour out of sight.

The hunter smiled grimly.

"Them's the folks that set out to capture the Mountain Star, but couldn't put their hands on the puffer when they wanted it."

Even such a veteran was surprised when the spring afternoon wore away without giving him the slightest inkling of the whereabouts of Dead Man's Mine. Not a move was made upon which to hang the most shadowy suspicion. He was mystified.

Nevertheless, he maintained his cramped position in the tree without food or drink, and would have stayed where he was until morning and through the next day, had he conceived any reason for doing so. But nothing was to be gained by remaining aloft, and he cautiously made his way to the ground, while it was still comparatively early in the evening.

One fact came to light during the course of the day that was curiously suggestive to Montana Hugh. The squaw man was dressed precisely like himself, with the coonskin cap, the hunting shirt, and the coarse trousers, while his height and build were much the same.

"There may come a chance," he reflected, "for me to make some of them varmints b'lieve I'm him. We both have a full beard, though I'm glad to know we don't look much alike in the sunlight. I can speak the Wusserman lingo purty well, which ain't the case with many of my kind."

He was hungry and thirsty. The latter want could be gratified, but not the former, without returning to the steamboat. Nothing, however, could induce him to waste that time, and he dismissed the thought from his mind.

He had located a small brook which flowed into the river, while he was perched in the tree, and, making his way to it, he lay down on his face and took a long, refreshing draft. Before he rose to his feet he became conscious of soft footfalls close to him. Fearing that some of his enemies were approaching the spot, he hastily shifted his position and then listened. He heard nothing, and applied his ear to the ground, but failed to catch the sound that had disturbed him.

This fact was trying to Montana Hugh, for, from some cause which he could not explain, but which was convincing, he was certain that the mysterious tramping had something to do with Dead Man's Mine.

CHAPTER XVIII.—DEAD MAN'S MINE.

It was a tremendous trial to the patience of the veteran hunter, but there was no help for it. He spent the entire night in mousing through the surrounding solitude without gaining the first inkling of the meaning of the mysterious footfalls that interested him so profoundly.

With the morning, however, came the knowledge.

While still groping through the mountainous wood, baffled and angry, but with a superb self control that prevented any impatient act, he caught the shadowy glimpse of an Indian, moving among the boulders, undergrowth, and trees in a direction that led directly away from the Sioux village. Hugh determined that the fellow should not escape him, confident that he was following the course of those who had baffled him the preceding night.

There was too much risk in directly trailing the redskin, for it was probable others were moving in the same direction, or, what was still more likely, some of his companions would soon be returning from the point which was his destination.

No severer test of woodcraft can be fancied than that of trailing a watchful enemy by keeping a hundred feet or more to one side of his footsteps. But Montana Hugh did it, dodging behind and around masses of rocks and boulders, leaping ravines and depressions, out of sight for minutes at a time, but never losing his quarry until the work was finished.

The Indian had crossed a small open space, all the while steadily ascending as his distance from the village increased, when he paused as abruptly as if he had heard the whirr of a rattlesnake in the path in front of him.

Hugh Hartley instantly dodged behind a rock, and removing his cap, cautiously peered out. He saw four Indians advance from some invisible point ahead and join the new comer. Each carried a rifle, and they talked for several minutes, with many gesticulations, though they were too far off for the eavesdropper to catch anything they said.

Then, without any preliminary movement, the party walked rapidly away, taking the course that the single Indian had been following, and instantly passed from view. This occurred so quickly that Montana Hugh was puzzled. While debating the right thing to do his eye rested upon a huge cottonwood, similar to the one that had served his purpose the day before. It stood only a few paces to the rear, and, believing it would be of help, he sank to the ground and worked his way to it.

It will be understood that he placed himself in frightful danger by climbing this tree, for, if detected by any of the Indians, he would be powerless to help himself. They could shoot him at their leisure, whereas, if he were on the ground, he could resort to his great fleetness, in which he acknowledged an inferiority to no man, whatever the color of his skin.

But having decided upon his course, he did not hesitate. Carefully keeping on the side furthest from the spot where he had seen the Indians, he went up the massive trunk, with the skill of a sailor ascending the rigging of a ship. He did not stop to take a survey of his surroundings until fully fifty feet from the ground, when with the same coolness and care, he softly parted the leaves and twigs in front of his face and peeped out.

His elevation was sufficient to permit him to look over the tops of most of the surrounding wood, to a mass of rocks and boulders, which must have covered half an acre. They were piled among and over one another in the most picturesque fashion; forming a scene often encountered among the Rocky Mountains, and which constitute not their least interesting feature.

Almost in the exact center of the face of this stony mass was an opening, broad and high enough to admit the passage of an ox team. That it lead into the interior of the ponderous boulders was evident, for the gaping mouth was dark, as if a vast extent of room lay beyond.

"It is Dead Man's Mine," was the conclusion of the hunter; "it is in there that the gold is found, and them Injins are all inside, though there's no saying how long they'll stay there. By the eternal; but that's the strangest thing I ever seed!"

Montana Hugh referred to the most impressive feature of the scene which remains to be described.

Three white men, fully clothed and each with a rifle across his knees, were seated in the opening to the cavern, and keeping guard over the treasures at their back. The seat of each was a goodly sized boulder, so that his posture was easy and seemingly as comfortable as could be desired. The pose was similar with all, the feet being quite near, the knees somewhat separated, the left hand resting on the deadly weapon extended across his lap, while the other hung loosely at his side.

The fur cap of each was shoved far enough back from the forehead to give a full view of the countenance, covered in the case of two with a grizzled beard, while the face of the third was as smooth as a child's and with scarcely a wrinkle showing.

All three seemed to be gazing out over the trail, along which the Indians came and went in visiting the wonderful gold mine. It looked as if these men had been made prisoners by the Sioux and compelled to mount guard night and day over the treasure of the mysterious cavern.

Montana Hugh was accustomed to the most gruesome sights, but a creepy feeling came over him, for it took but a minute's survey of the terrible picture to note that all three of the men had been dead most probably for months. In the dry, pure air of that elevated region, their flesh had been preserved, and a person suddenly coming upon them, might well believe they were alive.

But the waxen paleness of each drawn countenance, the horrible grinning

mouths and the glassy stare of the sunken eyes, told the fearful truth that could not be mistaken. Dead Man's Mine well deserved its gruesome name, for it was guarded by three dead men.

These were they who separately, or, perhaps together, had penetrated this solitude in the attempt to solve the dread secret. They had given up their lives in the vain effort, and the Indians with a grim humor that is rarely shown by their race, had carefully propped them up in the pose of sentinels, that those who dared to follow in their footsteps might take the lesson to heart.

With his eyes fixed upon each frightful countenance in turn, Montana Hugh muttered:

"That is Sandy Harmon on the left; I knowed him as well as my own brother; him and me spent two winters trapping on the headwaters of the Columbia; then he j'ined Jake Kasson in the hunt for Dead Man's Mine, and he found it!

"That's Joe Bigger next to him; he's the chap that was missed last summer, and it was said that Jake Kasson killed him in a quarrel; there ain't any doubt of it; he must have set out to find Dead Man's Mine, and he, too, found it!

"That smooth faced one is a stranger to me. He wasn't much more than a lad when he got took with his last sickness. He ain't as old as Jersey Jack. I s'pose some old praying mother, away off in the States is looking toward the West for her darling boy that will never come back to her ag'in, and I don't doubt that Jake Kasson has been the cause of it all. I'd like to draw bead on him!"

As if in response to the wish, the squaw man at that moment emerged from the interior of the cavern, walking around one of the ghostly sentinels, and halting just beyond, where he was joined by a couple of Indians.

Montana Hugh could not have asked for a better aim. As he expressed it, he could have picked off the miscreant with his eyes shut, but he was not the idiot to do anything of that nature. The act would rid the world of a wretch not fit to cumber it with his presence, but it would also seal the doom of Hugh himself.

After the party had departed in the direction of the Indian village, the hunter, from his elevated perch, continued his careful study of the scene, and soon made a second discovery, which in its way was almost as interesting as that which has been described, and bore directly upon the strange business that had brought Hugh and his friends into this lonely and dangerous solitude.

CHAPTER XIX.—SHARP WORK.

ON the right hand side of each of the stark, motionless forms that were guarding the entrance to the cavern, rested a small canvas bag, with the top securely tied. It resembled the bundle made by a handkerchief in which a traveler sometimes carries his belongings, either in his hand or over his shoulder, with a supporting stick thrust through the top.

But for the ghastly fact that none of the strange guardsmen could ever

need anything of the nature, Montana Hugh might have believed each bundle consisted of food, but he knew it was nothing of that sort.

Suddenly the truth flashed upon him. The strong canvas bags contained gold taken from Dead Man's Mine.

Jake Kasson, the squaw man, had lived among the Wusserman Sioux long enough to attain the rank and influence of a chief. It was his idea, placing the inanimate forms at the entrance to the mine, as a warning to intruders of what to expect. With a grim humor peculiar to the miscreant he set a valuable collection of gold on the right of each, as if to challenge any one to come and take it. It was a queer proceeding, but in keeping with his character.

"That means 'Come and take this stuff if you kin,'" muttered Montana Hugh, with a vicious gleam of his keen gray eyes; "wal, that's what me and my pards are going to do, or lose our skulps in trying."

Now it is not to be supposed that the squaw man, in carrying out his weird fancy, forgot the commonest precautions. The packages of gold were placed in the positions named each morning, and at night, either carried into the cavern or taken to the tepee of Kasson for safe keeping. Which of these courses was adopted, the watcher could not determine without waiting, and he had not time to do that.

He saw the Sioux coming and going, Kasson making the brief journey between the village and mine several times. Despite the antipathy of the American Indian to manual labor, it looked as if a number of them took turns in working the mysterious mine which must have been of amazing richness.

Montana Hugh, however, had learned what he set out to learn, and about the middle of the afternoon he cautiously descended from his perch, and by a roundabout course joined his anxious friends, who were waiting for him up the narrow creek, where the Mountain Star had been in hiding for two days.

Before he would give any information of his doings, he demanded food, for he was in a famishing state. When he had eaten a prodigious quantity and lit his pipe, it was growing dark, and he felt in a more amiable mood. It took but a few minutes to make clear all his astonishing experience and the plan of action which he had determined to follow.

So guarded and careful were our friends in their movements that the night was well advanced when they reached the vicinity of Dead Man's Mine. Hugh, as was to be supposed, took the leadership, continuing at a safe distance in front. He had made himself so familiar with the surroundings that he moved with as much certainty as if the sun were shining.

It will be remembered that there was no moon until after midnight, and the stargleam did not penetrate the foliage, which was dense and exuberant at that season of the year. Everything would have been in utter darkness but for the moving pine torches carried by the Sioux, who were passing at irregular intervals between the village and Dead Man's Mine.

It was the intention of Hugh to attempt nothing decisive for an hour or two, but it came about that he had no sooner caught sight of the three shadowy figures in front of the entrance than he saw that what was done must be done promptly.

An Indian came out of the cavern, holding a torch above his head. The smoky glow was reflected from his coppery countenance, and showed the three lifeless sentinels keeping their grim and silent watch.

Stooping down, he seized one of the canvas bags by the upper part and swung it over his shoulder. The laborious manner in which he did this confirmed Montana Hugh in his belief that the bag contained gold. At the same time, the light of his torch disclosed that the other two bags were still in place.

With the ponderous burden over his shoulder, the Indian moved slowly along the path in the direction of the village, his action proving that Hugh was right in believing the gold was taken thither for safe keeping until morning. At the moment of starting, a second Sioux brave came out of the interior and took the torch from the hand of the first, who moved off at a slow pace, as a man does who is heavily laden.

A hundred feet down the trail, the first Indian encountered a white man, who spoke in his own tongue.

"Let my brother give me the burden that is heavy, while he makes haste to the village of his people."

In the deep gloom only the dimmest outlines of the man could be discerned, but not doubting that it was Kasson, the squaw man, the bag was handed over to Montana Hugh, who, it will be understood, was taking the most desperate chances conceivable.

The Indian obeyed without reply, the faint sounds showing that he was passing down the trail toward the village without halt, and probably glad to be relieved of the burden.

Hardly moving from where he stood, Montana Hugh emitted a guarded whistle. On the instant, Baldy Burden was at his side. A few whispered words, and the second arrival stepped back.

Montana Hugh started up the trail toward the golden cavern and saw the second Sioux coming slowly forward, but instead of leaving his torch he bore it in one hand, while he managed the canvas bag with the other.

The situation was tenfold more critical, for the torch was likely to reveal the identity of Hugh and prevent the repetition of the trick he had just played so successfully upon the other, but he did not hesitate.

Standing absolutely motionless, the second Sioux had no suspicion of the proximity of the white man, until a shadowy arm was extended, and the torch taken from his hand and flung to the ground.

"Is my brother blind, that he does not know the way to his home?" asked Hugh in pretended anger, skilfully imitating the voice of Jake Kasson, with which it will be recalled he was familiar; "I will take the gold to the village, for my brother is weak and bends low under the load."

It was strange how meekly the brave accepted this reproof and surrendered the precious package to the supposed squaw man; but, to the alarm of Hugh, instead of keeping on down the trail toward the tepees, the Indian turned and walked back to the cavern, where a third warrior was in the act of taking charge of the remaining canvas bag.

Not only that, but some one was approaching from the direction of the village, his heavy footstep showing that he was hurrying.

Hugh stepped aside to avoid him and whistled softly. Jack Murfree was almost at his elbow, and accepted the second bag, immediately withdrawing into the gloom and rejoining Baldy Burden. Then, following instructions, the two began threading their way through the solitude to the distant point where the little steamer lay hidden.

The commonest prudence would have suggested to Montana Hugh that he ought to have been satisfied with what was accomplished, and to have withdrawn from the dangerous spot as soon as he could; but it may be said he was on his mettle, and he now resolved to attempt his master stroke.

It was Jake Kasson who had passed him, for the blazing torch in front of the cavern revealed the massive head and shoulders of the squaw man, as he strode up the trail. He saw him take the third bag from the Indian, who was about to start off with it, but in the act of doing so he abruptly paused and began an excited conversation with the Sioux, who had been joined by the second one—him who surrendered his treasure to Montana Hugh.

The Indian must have been mystified by the supposed actions of the squaw man, who, after taking the canvas bag from him, walked forward into the light without it and took possession of the remaining one.

His words and manner showed that he was trying to straighten out matters with the squaw man, who in his exasperated perplexity emitted several imprecations in English.

There was something in the business which he could not understand, and probably with a suspicion that some wonderfully clever trick was being played upon him, he lifted the bag, and, without throwing it over his shoulder, as his predecessors had done, he strode angrily down the trail, with the two Sioux following close upon his heels and the hindermost carrying the smoking torch.

"It sorter looks, Jake," muttered Montana Hugh, "as if you and me was going to bump agin each other!"

CHAPTER XX.—WAITING FOR DAYLIGHT.

THE squaw man was striding savagely down the trail, with the conviction rapidly intensifying that he had been outwitted after all, when, without the slightest warning, he received a tremendous blow directly in the face, from the fist of Montana Hugh, who leaped forward like a panther, with all his terrible strength concentrated in his right arm.

Jake Kasson went over backward, while the air seemed to be filled with revolving torches, moons, suns, and stars, instantly succeeded by blank darkness and oblivion.

The terrified Sioux, with the aid of the light which one of them was carrying, caught a glimpse of the shadowy figure that bounded out of the darkness and felled the squaw man, as if smitten by a thunderbolt from heaven. The sight was so frightful that they were thrown into a panic, and, without attempting to help their fallen leader, they dashed off, as if Satan himself was nipping at their heels.

It would have been the easiest matter in the world for Montana Hugh to

bring the evil career of the fallen miscreant to a close, but, though he felt that Kasson well deserved such a fate, he forebore, satisfied to leave him to the vengeance of heaven, which he had defied so long.

That which specially interested Hugh just then was the canvas bag that had fallen from the hand of the wretch as he went down. It required but a moment's groping in the darkness to find it, when the fellow started on his return to the Mountain Star.

The necessity for extreme caution in his movements had passed. Speed was the one necessity. He therefore lost no time in trying to find Baldy and Jack, but made his way so directly to the creek that he arrived fully fifteen minutes ahead of the couple, who were naturally anxious about the fate of their leader.

Convinced that they were in no immediate danger, the three chuckled over the amazing success that had attended their venture, when by the law of human probabilities the chances were a hundred to one against them.

Each man always carried a goodly supply of lucifers in a rubber safe, and Montana Hugh now untied with some difficulty the neck of the bag that he had set down at the forward part of the boat, and, striking a match, peered into the interior, with his friends staring over his shoulder.

The sight made their eyes dance. The contents of the bag consisted of nuggets of virgin gold, varying in size from a pea to a walnut, and certifying to the astonishing richness of Dead Man's Mine, from which they had been taken. An examination of the other bags revealed the same delightful condition of affairs.

The amount in each was substantially the same. As nearly as the men could judge the bags weighed respectively a hundred pounds, which would make the total value of the gold somewhat over seventy five thousand dollars—a goodly reward for the excursion up Wild Cat Fork in a steamer that cost only twenty five hundred dollars in St. Louis.

"Wal," said Hugh, as the three sat grouped together, "it looks as if the worst is over, but I don't think so."

"What do you consider the hardest task, Hugh?"

"To git down to the Yallerstone with the yaller stuff."

"The steamer is in good shape; the boat is piled with every stick of wood she will carry; I have a protection around my position, and, when we get into the river, where we have plenty of room, she will travel like a streak of lightning."

"That may all be so, but you forget that this confounded stream is as crooked as a ram's horn, and Jake Kasson and the Wussermans can cut across country and head us off."

"How can they head us off?" asked the surprised Jack; "if they get in front of us with their canoes, we will cut them down and swamp every one."

"But that won't be their style of working things; you forgit ag'in that the blame river has a good many narrow places, like them kenynons we passed through, which they can manage to block."

"But to do that they must have time in which to do the work, and, even with the winding stream, I don't see how they will get it."

"Jake Kasson has come to long before this; when he l'arns that the three canvas bags are gone, he will understand the whole game; he'll know the steamer is hiding somewhere near, and can't get far away afore morning; and you can make up your mind that he'll make things hum."

"Why not start now?" asked Baldy Burden, beginning to grow nervous from the words of their leader.

"It won't do," was the decisive reply of Jack Murfree; "the stream is full of rocks and bars, and in the darkness, we shall be sure of running upon one inside of an hour. We have been lucky in reaching this point without accident, but the hull of the boat is like an egg shell; a slight blow will puncture it, and then that will wind up its history."

"Or if the engine gets out of order?"

"That depends upon the nature of the accident; some of the parts, if fractured can be replaced, while others cannot; at the speed with which we must go, the liability to accident is greatly increased."

"We might drift to the mouth of the creek so as to be ready to start as soon as it is light," said Burden.

"There is no trouble about that, but I don't see how we shall gain anything; we must take time to get up steam, and it will be best when we debouch into Wild Cat Fork that we can show a clean pair of heels."

This sounded so sensible that Baldy Burden said no more, and it was agreed that they should stay where they were until morning.

One singular fact was that with all their intense listening, they heard not the slightest sound from the direction of the Sioux village. It would be supposed that the occurrences described would have created great excitement and doubtless they did, but so far as our friends were concerned, they discovered no evidence of it.

Montana Hugh was more strongly convinced than before that Jake Kasson would follow the line of conduct he had named. He might set some of the warriors to hunting for the steamer, but his main work would be devoted to blocking its flight, so that it and its crew would be at his mercy.

Hugh made as light of the moccasin found by Jack Murfree as Baldy Burden had done, agreeing that it was discarded by the owner for a better one, and the investigation of Jack was accepted as conclusive that the Sioux had not learned where the boat was hidden.

The strongest evidence that such was the fact was that so much time had elapsed without the Sioux proving they knew anything of it. Had they known where the boat was hiding, they would have paid it a visit long before.

The best proof of the belief of the three men in this view of the case was that about midnight all lay down in their blankets and slept soundly for several hours. But at the earliest appearance of light, all were astir, the conviction strong upon each that the crisis of their venture was at hand.

CHAPTER XXI.—NOW FOR THE YELLOWSTONE.

MONTANA HUGH displayed the same admirable coolness as he had shown from the beginning. He was the first man astir and insisted, after Jack Mur-

free had applied a match to the kindlings in the furnace, that all should eat a substantial meal before leaving the spot where the Mountain Star had been so long in hiding. The meal used up all the rations with which they were provided.

"It makes no difference," he remarked; "we sha'n't have time to do any eating today, and when night comes we'll take our chances; like enough we'll have to go two or three days without any fodder."

"It's fortunate that we shall not suffer for water," grimly replied Jack Murfree, who once more applied the oil can to all the bearings of the diminutive engine.

By the time the meal was finished there was enough rumbling steam in the boiler to revolve the screw, but it was not called into use.

The cord which held the steamer stationary was cut, and with the aid of the poles, the boat was shoved out into the creek, down which it began drifting with the current, it being readily kept clear of all obstructions by means of the poles.

Steam continued to make rapidly, and, when the main stream was reached, the gauge showed a pressure of eighty pounds. The instrument was fixed so that it would begin to blow off at a pressure of one hundred, while it was dangerous to allow the steam to rise far above that figure.

Jack had taken his station at the stern, flanked on both sides by the walls of wood which rose a few inches above his head, while the rest of the fuel was so arranged that he had a clear view along the craft and out upon the water.

Montana Hugh and Baldy Burden crouched in the hollow in the middle of the boat, which was used for sleeping quarters. Each held his rifle, with the muzzle resting on the gunwale, and his head so low that only the top of his cap was visible from the shores, one of which was carefully scanned by Hugh and the other by his companion.

It was their duty to watch for danger, and, so far as possible, ward it off, while Jack was to give his whole attention to running the boat.

Scanning the wooded bluffs on either hand, neither was able to discover the first sign of their enemies. Captain Jack opened the valve, and once more the blades of the screw began churning the clear water. Quickly catching the impulse, the graceful steamer leaped forward like a charger under the prick of the spur, and the dash for the distant Yellowstone was fairly begun.

Haste was necessary, but Jack Murfree was prudent. He held that boat at what may be considered three fourths speed, since anything higher than that was liable to injure the machinery. It was better to reserve the full capacity of the craft until the necessity arose.

The natural skill of the young captain was much improved by the voyage up stream. He became acquainted with the peculiarities of the current, and was able to read the danger signs unerringly. Thus he readily avoided the sunken rocks whose crests approached within a few inches of the top, while the shallow portions were left on either hand, as was convenient. Should he remain undisturbed, there was no doubt of his ability to take the craft to the head of Bison Rapids, from which point, of course, they would have to make the remaining ten miles on foot.

The hope of the party was that the voyage could be concluded by the close of the second day. The velocity of the current, added to that of the boat, made the rate of progress fully twenty miles an hour. While this would be decreased at many points, two thirds of the distance ought to be passed by nightfall. By that time it would be necessary to take on a new supply of wood, and naturally they contemplated the necessity with some misgiving. But the start had been made, and there was no turning back.

Less than a mile was passed, and they were sweeping around a bend in the river, when Montana Hugh discharged his rifle at some point on the top of the bluff on the left.

"I didn't expect to wing him," he explained, without changing his position, "but I give him a scare."

Which is what the Sioux at whom he fired did for our friend; for, so near after the shot that the report sounded like its echo came the reply from the bluff, where a slight puff of smoke showed.

There was no mistaking the target of the Indian. His position probably gave him a view of Jack Murfree's cap, for his bullet was imbedded in one of the sticks of wood within a few inches of his face.

"Since I can do my work as well by shortening my height," coolly remarked the captain, "it is well to do so."

With his hands grasping the spokes of the wheel, he crouched lower, and a glance at the right and left showed that he was securely protected.

The dusky miscreant who had come so uncomfortably close, now made the mistake of rising to his feet, probably to ascertain the success of his aim. The action brought him into plain view of Montana Hugh, who picked him off with neatness and despatch. The screech of the Sioux was heard as he bounded in air, falling close to the edge of the cliff, though he did not tumble over.

"It beats all creation how careless some folks are," remarked the hunter, without shifting his position, but on the alert for another chance to decrease the number of his foes.

The fate of the rash brave was not lost upon his companions, who took care not to reveal themselves, although several more shots were fired. That the Sioux were good marksmen was proven by the plainly heard thuds of the bullets, every one of which found a lodgment in the boat or pile of wood.

"This protection of mine wasn't such a bad idea after all," reflected Jack Murfree, "and I wonder that I didn't receive a shot or two when coming up the river without anything to guard me."

He drew open the furnace door at his feet, caught up several sticks of wood placed within convenient reach and flung them in the flames.

The work of feeding the furnace was likely to become more dangerous as the supply of wood ran down, since the veterans who would help must of necessity expose themselves, but for some time to come, nothing of the kind was to be feared.

The steam gauge showed a pressure of one hundred pounds, and it would have gone higher but for the spitting steam that escaped. The pump worked freely, and the captain and engineer was too alive to the situation to allow the supply of water to run low.

Somehow or other, his chief fear was that the machinery would break down. While, as has been explained, he had duplicates with which to replace many portions, there were others—supposed to be less liable to accident—that could not be replaced. The giving out of any of these meant the irreparable collapse of the Mountain Star.

Moreover, any sort of a mishap would mean a stoppage of an hour or more until the repair could be made, and, if it should happen that the Indians were in waiting on either shore, it will be seen that they would have the power to make the situation of the three men exceedingly uncomfortable.

But all these things had been thought of beforehand, and it was useless to speculate upon them until the crisis came.

The forenoon had not passed when Jack Murfree perceived the narrow canyon-like passage over which the Indians had tumbled the huge rock when the Mountain Star was ascending the stream. His companions instantly centered their attention upon it.

"Do you see anything wrong?" asked Jack, slackening the speed of the boat and anxiously scanning the dangerous place.

Neither of the men replied for a minute or so. Both had risen to their feet and were studying the tops of the mountainous walls with closest attention. Montana Hugh shaded his eyes and leaned his head forward for a brief while, and then abruptly uttered an exclamation:

"They're there, hang 'em! waiting for us!"

CHAPTER XXII.—INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH.

JACK MURFREE reversed until the whirling screw held the steamer stationary a little way above the entrance to the canyon. He had to decide quickly what to do.

The prow was turned straight toward the passage with its swiftly flowing current, and he looked up at the towering crests on both sides, which were surmounted by loose boulders and masses of rocks sufficient to crush the steamer to fragments, should any of them fall upon it.

Which one was destined to plunge into the chasm, or had the Sioux arranged to tumble over several?

Unfortunately the dusky miscreants were free to do their infernal work without exposing themselves to the Winchesters of the men on the Mountain Star. Standing back from the edge of the canyon, they could apply their united strength at the moment necessary and then safely note the result.

"Boys," called Jack after his momentary pause, "I am going through as fast as this boat can travel; it's our only hope!"

"All right; let her go!"

He whirled the valve wide open and the upright connecting rod began leaping up and down with a fierceness that made the craft tremble in every timber, while the water at the stern was pounded into foam that was flung far out on each side of the boat. The thumping was dangerous to the steamer itself, but the emergency demanded it.

Like a frightened animal beset by wolves the Mountain Star seemed to

feel that it was the only chance for escape, and she bounded ahead as if fired from a colossal catapult. When she sprang into the mouth of the canyon, helped by the swift current, her speed was forty miles an hour!

While the burst was probably unexpected to the Sioux, they were not wholly unprepared for it. If they chose to fire down upon the boat, their bullets would pierce the canvas like so much paper, and knowing where the men were crouching, they would have a good chance of hitting them.

But they had placed their dependence upon the boulders. Jack Murfree's position was so far back that he could look over the end of the canvas screen and clearly see the crests of the rocks. He was in plain view, but he made no attempt to shield himself from any shot.

A slight agitation or trembling on the right told him that the first move would be made from that side. On the instant he headed the boat toward the opposite wall. Quickly as it was done it was not a moment too soon. A boulder several feet in diameter seemed to bound forward of its own accord and dive straight for the puffing steamer in the gorge far below.

The craft dodged it by a hair, and it plunged into the deep current, sending the spray aloft to the height of twenty feet.

"Look out!" shouted Baldy; "there comes another from t'other side!"

Jack had no time to sheer off, though he made the attempt, but this huge missile was more poorly aimed than the first and fell six feet to the stern.

Everything was going with bewildering swiftness. The Mountain Star must soon dash from the mouth of the canyon or be destroyed.

One of the Sioux, probably the leader, seemed to fear the craft would escape after all, and he now did a brave thing.

Standing on the very edge of the chasm, where his sinewy figure was outlined against the blue sky behind him, he raised a boulder, as heavy as he could lift, and poising himself for a moment in clear view, to make his aim unerring, he hurled it just in front at the steamer dashing forward for dear life.

Jack Murfree stared transfixed. Had he known that it was to crush directly down upon his crown, he could not have stirred. Hugh and Baldy stood so as to look out from the side of the canvas, and they were equally helpless, though not so inactive.

Had the missile struck the bottom of the boat it would have gone straight through as if fired from the largest piece of ordnance, but it landed on the pile of wood, breaking a score of sticks to fragments, hurling the splinters right and left, and then rolled overboard without having inflicted any injury.

But Montana Hugh had his eye on the daring fellow who still stood on the edge of the canyon, looking down to see the steamer go to the bottom. He was still peering over when the hunter pulled his trigger, and the subsequent proceedings interested the Sioux no more. He did not topple into the abyss, some one evidently seizing him from the rear and drawing him back in time to prevent his fall.

Impelled by an intuition, which saves us more frequently in this life than most people suspect, Jack Murfree shied the steamer again to the right, passing so close to the wall that the hull scraped it. The act saved him from a

fourth boulder, which splashed on the exact spot where the steamer would have been, but for this abrupt change of position.

It will be understood that these stirring incidents occupied but a few brief moments. Darting into the canyon with such amazing speed, and dodging to the right and left without diminishing her velocity, the steamer bounded out with arrowy swiftness into the broader and calmer waters below.

She had had a wonderful escape, which it would be impossible to repeat. At any rate, Jack Murfree felt that ten times the amount of gold they had on board would not tempt him to try the passage again with those fearful missiles shooting down as if they were meteors hurled from the sky.

He partially shut off steam, relieving the terribly racking the boat was undergoing, and looked about to assure himself the craft had suffered no injury.

Instead of giving their attention to the craft, Hugh and Baldy kept their eyes upon the crest of the canyon, suspecting that the Sioux, in their disappointment, would make reckless attacks upon them.

Singular to say, nothing of the kind took place. Not a redskin was visible, nor did a single shot come from the point where they were gathered.

Hugh was at a loss to account for it.

"It don't seem nat'ral," he remarked, when the strain of the incident was over; "that varmint that come out into full view and tried to smash us with the rock, why he acted nat'ral, but this ere looks bad."

"What can be bad about it?" inquired Jack, vastly relieved to find everything in good shape.

"It looks as if they've fixed onto some other scheme that is surer of wiping us out than this one."

"Gracious! what can that be?"

"We shall have to wait and see; another thing that p'int's that way is that Jake Kasson ain't with that gang."

Baldy turned toward his friend.

"How the blazes can you know that?"

"Didn't it look as if the varmints had us fast?"

"It did sartin sure, that is for a minute or two."

"When everything looked that way, if the squaw man had been with the varmints, he would have let us know it, just to show his pleasure over the scrape we was in."

"There was too much risk in exposing himself," suggested Jack Murfree.

"He didn't have to expose himself; he could have whooped over the edge of the kenyon without giving us a glimpse of his purty face, and 'cause he didn't do nothing of the kind," added Hugh with emphasis, "you kin make up your mind that he warnt there, but is waiting for us at some p'int down stream where he's sure of catching us."

CHAPTER XXIII.—A DASH AND THE RESULT.

It was one of the rare occasions in the life of Montana Hugh when he was mystified and undecided as to the best course to follow.

While firm in his belief that the squaw man and the Sioux held their

supreme effort for the overthrow of the whites in reserve, he could not figure out its nature. The immediate flurry caused by the passage of the canyon being over, all three gathered near the stern, where Jack Murfree was steering.

They called to mind, as well as they could, the course and characteristics of the river as noticed on their way up.

"There's another kenyon," said Baldy, "but it is a good deal broader than the last one, and by keeping in the middle, they couldn't reach us with any rocks."

"I've been thinking of that," remarked Hugh, "and you're right; besides, it is so fur down the river that I don't b'lieve Jake and his varmints can reach it ahead of us; depend upon it, the place they have in mind is somewhere else."

"You may recall," observed Jack, who held the boat at an easy pace, "that not very far below, just beyond the next big bend, I think, the river is quite narrow."

"What of it?" was the natural query of the veterans in unison.

"I don't know; but they could get there before us, for the reason that they did so at the canyon."

"S'pose they do," said Hugh, "what good will it do 'em?"

"None that I can think of; I fancied you might be able to figure it out; suppose they were waiting there with half a dozen canoes filled with armed Indians, what is to prevent their making a dash and boarding us?"

The massive shoulders of Montana Hugh shook with silent mirth.

"Baldy, what fun that would be for us to scrooch down and pick 'em off with our repeaters!"

"But they might come too fast to be picked off."

"Jersey, I reckon you haven't got your think tank in order. In the fust place, if them canoes go in front you could run right over 'em as you said some time ago; and if they undertook to run out from shore and board us, you could leave 'em behind, jest the same as if they were standing still. No; Jersey, it won't do."

But Jack Murfree was not willing to abandon his theory.

"I couldn't run them all down; I don't believe I could run any down, for they would dodge the steamer as it shot past, and then leap from their boats upon ours, as we brushed against 'em."

"That would be reasonable, Jersey, if it wasn't for one thing."

"What's that?"

"It isn't the Injin style of doing such things; the critters haven't the nerve to make an attack of that sort when they know that, if they do come out ahead, they've got to lose a big number of their braves."

"It may not be the general way the red men have of fighting, but some of the people have a fine reputation for bravery, and the Sioux are among the best."

"Bah! when you get down to hard pan, they're all the same."

"Well, Hugh," said Jack a trifle impatiently, "you insist that the decisive fight is yet to come; if that is the case, you ought to be able to give some inkling of its nature."

"Not a blamed inkle, but we shall soon know, for we're purty close to the narrer place you've been talking 'bout."

Jack Murfree scanned the river in advance and said:

"I didn't suspect we were so near, but you are right."

It was evident that if the hunter was correct in his theory that trouble was at hand, it was to appear in a form that could not be guarded against. As at the canyon, they would have to meet it as it presented itself and do their best, trusting to Providence and their pluck to pull them through.

Ten minutes later, when the Mountain Star steamed around the sweeping bend and came in sight of the long stretch of river below, there was an exclamation from all three.

Montana Hugh was right. Jake Kasson had arranged his *coup d'etat* for that point, as all perceived at the first glance.

Wild Cat Fork narrowed to a width of no more than fifty yards, it being the straightest portion indeed between the Sioux village and Bison Rapids. The current naturally increased in swiftness, though not to the extent that would be supposed, perhaps because of the greater depth of the stream.

Across the narrowest portion of the river a boom of trees had been stretched, secured at the ends to one another by powerful hickory withes and reaching from shore to shore. All the trunks were of goodly size, and the first impression was that the obstruction was impassable.

"Better turn about and head up stream," suggested Baldy Burden, looking inquiringly at Montana Hugh, who did not speak.

Jack Murfree hesitated for only a moment.

"No; here goes! We shall break through or sink!"

"It's sink, then!" growled Baldy, who, like his companion, stooped down to secure the protection of the wood about them.

Jack Murfree glanced at the dark line of logs stretching like a shaggy serpent from bank to bank. He was searching for a weak spot, but saw none.

He knew the chances were that when he flung the bow of the steamer against these solid trunks it would be staved in like cardboard. The last purpose in building the craft was that of butting, but it must be done now.

He had again turned the valve wide open, and the rod which revolved the shaft was thumping up and down at a terrific rate. The bow cut the water like a knife, and once more the steamer was dashing down stream at a speed of forty miles an hour.

It would seem that to strike the boom while going at this tremendous rate was like plunging against a mountain wall.

Montana Hugh and Baldy Burden did not believe they had a ghost of a chance, and braced themselves for a leap into the water and a desperate swim for their lives without giving a thought to the canvas bags at their feet which were the cause of the frightful plight in which they found themselves.

But it was different with Jack Murfree. He saw a faint hope which did not appear to his friends.

The engine being at the stern, that part of the boat was considerably deeper in the water than the bow, which seemed to stand well up and almost clear of the surface when the boat was proceeding at so swift a pace.

Just to the left of the center of the stream a log lay deeper in the river than the rest of the boom. But for several small limbs which projected from the trunk it would have been difficult to locate it.

Jack turned the prow toward that spot and crowded on every ounce of steam, as if he expected to split the obstruction in two by the resistless impact.

Two hopes inspired the young man. The first was that by striking the boom with tremendous momentum, he would snap the lashings that held it together and open a way for the boat without injuring the hull.

It is a law of mechanics that in such cases the advantage rests with the charging body, on the principle that a tallow candle may be fired through a pine board, but the danger was that the steamer's own momentum would prove its destruction.

The terrible test was not demanded, and the second peg on which the young man hung his hopes proved the true one.

Striking the partly submerged trunk, the prow did not push it aside, but slid up on it the same as if ascending an inclined plane. As it did so, the weight of the boat steadily forced the log downward until there was an abundance of room for the hull to glide over it.

Which is precisely what occurred. Not one of the three men, braced for the shock, felt anything more than a slight jar, but they heard the log scrape underneath, and, looking back, saw it bob up again like a cork.

Not a lashing had been broken; every withe held as if a chain of steel; the boom was intact, but the Mountain Star had ridden safely over it.

CHAPTER XXIV.—THE WHITE FLAG OF SURRENDER.

If Jack Murfree and his friends were astounded by the wonderful escape, what must have been the emotions of the Sioux, grouped on the banks, and exultingly awaiting the moment when the three white men would be at their mercy?

Jake Kasson, the squaw man, was their leader. His shout was recognized as it rang out at the moment the Mountain Star charged straight upon the boom with the speed of a runaway locomotive.

Not until the steamer had gone several times its own length and continued rushing down stream with unabated speed did he realize what had taken place. Then he and his score of merciless Sioux rose to their feet as one man and poured their volleys into the boat.

Montana Hugh had been expecting this, and an instant before the shots rang out, he shouted:

"Down, or you're dead men!"

He meant the warning for both of his companions, but it was hardly needed by Jack Murfree, who, as will be remembered, was shielded by the wooden walls built up on his right and left; but, as Hugh and Baldy stooped below the gunwales, the young captain instinctively crouched.

And where would he have been but for the protection which his own thoughtfulness had erected when awaiting the return of his companions to the boat in hiding up the creek?

A dozen bullets must have struck the framework, for the Sioux were on both sides of the river, though the majority were on the left bank. He heard the pattering of the leaden pellets, and he was almost blinded by the dust and fragments of bark that flew about his head.

It was no time to slacken speed. Everything depended upon getting out of range, for some of the wood was displaced by the storm, and the captain was partly uncovered. Among the weapons of the Sioux, too, were a number of repeaters, which kept up a scattering fusillade.

The engine was panting fearfully, and the connecting rod which turned the shaft was thumping up and down at a vicious rate.

"A few minutes longer," reflected Jack, stooping low, glancing along the boat and out at the front to make sure the way was clear; "the engine seems to be tearing the boat to pieces——"

"Jersey!" shouted Montana Hugh from the pit, where he and Baldy were crouching; "something is the matter!"

Jack Murfree had perceived it at the same instant. He reached up his hand to twist around the little circle which closed the valve, but it refused to turn. He put forth all his strength, but the obdurate thing would not yield. The engine was thumping out its own life.

Suddenly the connecting rod which was plunging up and down began beating the air with indescribable fierceness. It flapped about like a writhing serpent, but the screw had ceased to revolve.

The cause was evident. The rod had broken off close to where it joined the shaft.

Once more Jack wrenched at the wooden wheel which controlled the valve, and this time it moved easily. Steam was shut off, for it was of no further use.

"The engine is broken," he coolly said, speaking from his crouching position, as the white faces of his companions peered over at him.

"Can't it be fixed?" asked Hugh.

"No; there's nothing to fix it with."

Strange that in providing himself with several duplicates of the parts of the engine Jack Murfree had neglected the very one first needed.

Such was the fact and the Mountain Star was as helpless as one of the logs that composed the boom over which she had ridden in safety.

But she still maintained a goodly portion of the tremendous speed, and was amenable to her rudder.

"We must run ashore and take to the woods," he said.

"Take the right bank," said Hugh; "there wernt as many shots from that side as the other."

"That's what I intended to do," he replied, turning the spokes of the wheel in the right direction.

The next question that presented itself to the three was whether Jake Kason and the Sioux were aware of the fatal mishap that had overtaken the steamer. They must have noticed the cessation of the revolutions of the screw, but it might be that they did not understand the cause.

The great speed with which the boat had traveled from the moment she

darted into the canyon had carried it to a point nearly an eighth of a mile below the obstructing boom of logs, but the disappointed Indians, after leaping to their feet and observing the miscarriage of their plans, started on a run down the shores, maintaining a wild fire at the craft in the hope of reaching some of the crew.

"We must do something to stop 'em," said Hugh; "and being as we're aiming for the right bank, blaze away at the varmints on that side."

Of necessity they were driven to take the shore named, for the left consisted mainly of a series of bluffs, reaching sheer to the water's edge, where it would be difficult, if not impossible, for them to make a quick landing.

The right bank was low and thickly wooded. This made it harder for the Sioux to keep up the pursuit of the boat, though the party on one shore was as enthusiastic as on the other.

Alert, cool and watchful, Jack Murfree fixed upon the point where it looked as if a speedy landing could be made. He headed the *Mountain Star* for it, and called in a guarded voice:

"Be ready to jump, boys, the instant we are near enough!"

"Never mind us," replied Hugh; "look out for yourself."

"We must take the canvas bags with us."

"You can bet your sweet life we will."

Naturally the steamer was losing speed every minute, but she still possessed enough momentum to obey her rudder, and the young captain was confident of reaching shore at the precise point he had in mind.

It was still some distance away, when he deliberately drew a white handkerchief from his pocket, and with a piece of the whistle cord tied it fast to the top of the narrow smokestack, which was the highest point on the boat.

It was the white flag of surrender.

The Sioux might not know its meaning, or, if they did, would give it no consideration, for those people do not fight according to the laws of civilized nations.

Jake Kasson the squaw man would understand its significance. Indeed, as the white emblem fluttered in the wind made by the motion of the boat, his hoarse shout was recognized above the din of the red men hurrying along the bank.

By this time the boiler was blowing off steam at a deafening rate. Montana Hugh and Baldy Burden had risen to an upright position. The former looked up at the handkerchief above his head and said something, but the racket made by the escaping vapor prevented Jack Murfree hearing the words.

A portion of the whistle cord still dangled from its fastening. Jerking this free, the young man hurriedly tied down the safety valve from which the steam was spitting in spiteful jets. Instantly the stillness became such that only the rippling of the water from the prow and the cries of the Indians on the banks reached the ears of the three men.

Jack's next proceeding was characteristic. Flinging open the furnace door, he hastily crammed it as full of wood as it would hold. The interior was a mass of roaring flame, and steam was making fast. This was inevitable.

because of the breaking down of the engine, none of it was lost through use, while the safety valve was hermetically closed.

The index finger pointed to the figures 100 when the whistle cord was wrapped about it, and the finger began perceptibly moving around the circle and climbing higher and higher.

In an incredibly brief period it reached 120 degrees, and was already close to the perilous point. The pressure was increasing so fast that he lifted the latch of the door of the furnace and drew it back an inch or two. This admitted enough air to hold the gauge stationary, but there was no recession of the figures.

At the moment the overhanging limbs began bursting the top and sides of the steamer Jack Murfree again closed the furnace door.

The hull impinged against the bank and rebounded as if it were a rubber ball. The rudder was set so as to help the change of direction, and the craft began moving diagonally across the river toward the other bank.

Jake Kasson noted the white flag fluttering from the funnel, and saw that the steamer, still retaining a part of its momentum, was approaching the shore with the prospect of striking a projecting point of land, toward which he made all haste with his exulting Sioux.

"We've got 'em at last!" was his thought; "they came mighty nigh getting the best of us, but we shall have a few more sentinels to guard Dead Man's Mine against the like of them!"

CHAPTER XXV.—THE LAST OF THE MOUNTAIN STAR.

THE squaw man had learned something of steam navigation in his earlier days. Although astonished to see the Mountain Star glide unharmed over the boom of logs, he quickly perceived the clever manner in which it was done.

He was more mystified by the sudden cessation of the revolving screw. He could not understand why there should be any slackening of speed at the very time it was most needed to carry the boat beyond range of the fusillade from the Sioux; but it was not long before he understood what it meant. The engine had broken down, and the boat was drifting with the current.

The sight thrilled him with delight, for it convinced him that the escape of the three men, who had played the most daring trick ever attempted, was impossible.

The fact, however, that the craft was heading for the opposite shore caused him some uneasiness, and he called to the Sioux on that side to make haste to meet it. These braves were some distance to the rear, and there was no time to lose.

Next came the display of the white flag. The crew, seeing themselves helpless, threw themselves upon the mercy of their conquerors.

"So Montana Hugh and Baldy Burden and that young chap have made up their minds to surrender, eh!" he chuckled; "they won't be the first white men to do that sort of thing to me and the Sioux, but them as done it before have never had the chance to tell their friends anything 'bout it, and I shouldn't wonder if it'll be the same way now."

As he hurried along the bluff, which decreased in height as he approached the point of land referred to, he watched the course of the steamer as best he could, but was not always successful.

At the moment of its impingement against the bank, he fancied he saw something peculiar, but could not make out what it was.

"It can't be that them chaps tried to jump ashore," he said in dismay; "that wouldn't be honorable after surrendering; besides, Leaping Panther and his braves are too close for 'em to git away. No, Hugh has some sense of honor left," added the squaw man with immense relief; "he's coming over to this side to surrender."

His misgiving returned when, in scrutinizing the approaching boat, he failed to see any of the crew, but he consoled himself with the thought:

"They're keeping out of sight, afraid that some of my men may forget themselves in their ardor."

The acquired momentum of the steamer had so dwindled that it would have drifted past had not a dozen Sioux run out into the water and seized the gunwale, checking its progress, and bringing it to land.

As they did so, a savage imprecation escaped Jake Kasson, for he saw that the white men had done the very thing he thought impossible. They were nowhere in sight, proof that they had jumped ashore at the moment the steamer struck the further bank, though he weakly hoped that Leaping Panther and his men had gathered them in.

The Sioux who had captured the Mountain Star were as delighted as so many children over the gift of a brilliant toy. They scrambled upon the boat, tumbling the wood about, curiously examining the strange sight, and finally gathered at the stern, which was of the most interest, because of its engine, boiler, and machinery.

Jake Kasson joined them, for, despite his disappointment, he was not lacking in curiosity.

He saw the closed furnace door, glowing red from the fire that was raging behind it, while the broken connecting rod dangled below, snapped apart, where it had been fastened to the shaft that caused the screw to revolve.

"That explains their trouble," he mused; "the old thing couldn't stand all that was expected of her; a hoss can run so fast and no faster. I s'pose that young chap tied down that safety gauge, as it seems to be, so as not to lose any of the steam that he needed in running the boat."

With the swarming Sioux all around him, and gaping at the seething boiler and ominously silent machinery, the squaw man's eyes wandered to the dial face, on which the steam pressure was registered. Although not positive on the point, he suspected its purpose.

"I don't know how much that ere b'iler is intended to hold, but it strikes me that it must be purty well strained as it is. That little finger is p'inting at the figgers 128 and——"

Jake Kasson had gotten thus far in his remarks when the boiler exploded.

It bravely resisted the terrific pressure from within to a degree beyond what was intended, until the steadily increasing strain tore the iron into fragments, shattering the hull and sending wood, wreckage, iron, bolts, and wild

Indians flying in all directions as if ejected by the crater of Vesuvius in one of its violent eruptions.

Evidently when Jack Murfree tied down the safety valve and crammed the furnace full of wood, he had planned for this conclusion of the whole matter and fortune favored him to an astonishing degree.

It is probable that had the final catastrophe been deferred for a few minutes the squaw man would have discovered the peril of himself and companions and fled from the terrific rending of wood and iron; but, as we have shown, the consummation was on time.

There is no way of telling the exact results of the explosion of the Mountain Star, for months passed before anything reliable could be learned; but it was known that Jake Kasson, and at least a dozen of Sioux, ended their career then and there. Some of the bodies landed on shore, while others drifted down stream, the fragments being strewn along the banks for miles.

A number were injured, but escaped with their lives, while most of those that were standing on the bank, including a couple who had just moved to the prow, were not injured.

But no men could have been more panic stricken than they. From the first, they had felt somewhat "creepy" over the craft that was painted to resemble a fiery monster, while it vomited flame and smoke, and had a voice that was more terrible than any cry they had ever heard. It was the repeated assurances of the squaw man that induced them to attack the craft, with the result that he and a number of their best men entered into their "happy hunting grounds" without a moment's preparation.

For the following hour or two the survivors devoted their energies to getting away from the spot with all the speed possible. They hardly paused until they reached their village miles distant. Even there, they were restless for several days, and held themselves ready to plunge further into the solitude upon hearing the first blast of the terrible dragon that had wrought such woful destruction among their tribe.

But the Mountain Star was to fret them no more. The shapeless wreck drifted down stream to be gradually disintegrated by the current and the elements, until hardly a recognizable fragment remained of the once graceful craft that had plowed its way through the crystalline waters of Wild Cat Fork.

CHAPTER XXVI.—NOT YET "OUT OF THE WOODS."

THE reader has already formed a correct opinion of the course of the crew of the Mountain Star when the breaking down of its machinery rendered it of no further possible service.

No intelligent lamb ever surrenders to the wolf, and the fluttering white flag at the funnel of the little steamer was intended merely to gain time—a ruse whose propriety, under the circumstances, no one will criticise.

Despite the flurry of the moment, Montana Hugh and his companions maintained their coolness. The object of cramming the furnace with wood, tying down the safety valve, and then heading the craft for the other side of the river has been made manifest.

Not only did the three intend to leap ashore and take to the woods, but they meant to do their utmost to hide their action from the enemies whose eyes were on the boat.

This was not so difficult as might appear. The mass of piled up fuel served to screen the movements of the men crouching behind it, Jack Murfree, after securing the wheel in a fixed position, having joined the couple. Just before touching land, each of the three with a vigorous effort flung a bag of gold to shore. Then, keeping hidden as much as possible, they followed suit, diving into the wood before the moving boat glided from behind them.

The course of the men was the most natural, in the perilous situation, and, as we have shown, was suspected by Jake Kasson, but his failure to observe their flight and the display of the flag of truce partly deceived him.

The danger of our friends, however, was mainly from Leaping Panther and his Sioux, who were on the same side of the river, and, in obedience to the shouted commands of Jake Kasson, were hurrying to the spot to defeat the very thing that was attempted.

The first words after landing were uttered by Montana Hugh, just as he slung his heavy canvas bag over one shoulder, while he held his Winchester in his other hand:

"Boys, there ain't any time to throw away."

"And I reckon we ain't throwing any away," replied Baldy Burden, who was at his side, as eager as he to get out of the dangerous neighborhood.

Strange that Jack Murfree should be so deliberate and cool, when the veterans were plainly nervous. Pausing on the edge of the wood, where he was just beyond sight of the howling horde on the other side of the stream, he looked back at the steamer that was heading for the other shore.

"It's too bad," he said, "but there's no help for it."

"You can stay there if you want to," called Hugh impatiently.

But the young man had no intention of staying there, after such a remarkable opportunity had presented itself. He did not forget that a number of Sioux were near at hand and hurrying to the spot.

There was no time to take any luggage with them, much as they desired to do so. Each man had his weapons and bag of gold and no more.

As Jack turned to follow his friends they were just passing from view, and had he not made a dash they would have been lost to him.

Not until they had penetrated a hundred yards into the rocky solitude did the trio pause to exchange a few words.

"If the varmints 'spect what we're up to," said Hugh, "they'll be hot on our trail."

"They weren't nigh enough to observe us," remarked Jack, "as we sprang ashore."

"It ain't likely they did, but it's safer to make up your mind they did."

In keeping with this declaration, the veteran knelt down and applied his ear to the ground. At first he fancied he detected faint footfalls, but after a little longer listening decided he was mistaken.

Still this might be the case and signify nothing, for any Indian can trail an enemy so silently that the keenest ear fails to detect the slightest noise. Acting

on the advice of Hugh, the three stationed themselves among the boulders and dense undergrowth, with rifles ready for instant use.

When ten minutes had passed without bringing the least evidence of the approach of Indians, they agreed that it was a waste of time to linger longer.

"Of course we can't hide our trail till we take to water," explained Hugh, "and we're likely to git a chance to do that afore long, when it'll be plain sailing for us."

"What I've been thinking of," said Baldy Burden, "is that if the Sioux on this side don't 'spect what we've done, it won't be long afore they'll find it out; for when the boat reaches the other side of the river, and they observe that we ain't aboard, why it'll be as plain as the nose on your face."

"If the boat behaved as I expected," said Jack Murfree, "it is about time we heard something from her——"

As if in answer to the thought, a thunderous report rolled through the solitude, shaking the earth and echoing between the bluffs, like a reverberating peal of thunder.

Montana Hugh grimly extended his hand to the young man.

"If I'm not mistook, we've heerd from the Mountain Star."

"There can be no doubt of it; Jack Kasson and his Sioux have learned more than they ever knew."

"And I reckon more than they'll ever l'arn ag'in," was the suggestive, and as the reader has learned, truthful remark of Baldy Burden.

It was a terrific conclusion to the wild enterprise of the little party, but impressive as it was, they were not wholly relieved from fear. It was not to be supposed that any of the Sioux on the right bank of Wild Cat Fork had been harmed by the explosion of the craft on the other shore. They were still free to take the trail of the fugitives and run them down.

The great point to be gained therefore was to throw their enemies off the scent, and the only way by which this could be done has been mentioned. They must take to the water, a proceeding which baffles even the marvelous scent of the bloodhound.

But the task proved impossible, handicapped as they were. When they paused on the bank of a creek as large as that in which they had hidden the Mountain Star and thought the thing could be done, they found it beyond their power. Their axes and hatchets were at the bottom of Wild Cat Fork, and the only cutting implements in their possession were their knives.

These were useless in providing logs for the raft that would be required to buoy them. While it was a small matter to wade into the creek and swim downward for a half mile if necessary, it was a different thing when they had not only their rifles, but a hundred extra pounds apiece to carry. Such a load is sufficient to pull down the strongest swimmer, and the width of the stream was too great to permit them to fling the precious stuff to the shore.

Montana Hugh cut a sapling twenty feet in length, and, leaning over, thrust down one end a short way from shore. When it touched bottom, the depth shown was double his own height. Wading, therefore, was out of the question.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed impatiently: "what's to be gained by fool-

ing? If the varmints are onto us we shall have to make a fight for it; let's head for the Yallerstun and keep going as long as we can."

The advice was so sensible that it was immediately adopted. They knew the general course to follow, and as soon as it was prudent could use Wild Cat Fork as their guide, though it was unsafe to approach it at present.

Fortunately the day was drawing to a close and the danger could not continue much longer. Every minute that passed without bringing any sign of the presence of their enemies added to their sense of security.

Montana Hugh took the lead, with Baldy Burden close behind him, and Jack Murfree bringing up the rear, all walking in Indian file, and using their eyes and ears to the best of their ability. While their past experience led them to be hopeful, it also warned them against taking anything for granted, and impressed anew the truth that some time must yet pass before they could hope to be "out of the woods."

CHAPTER XXVII.—SAFE AT LAST.

SUDDENLY Montana Hugh uttered an exclamation of astonishment. It was already growing dark in the wood, and his massive figure was only dimly discernible in the gloom.

As he spoke, he stopped in his walk and lowered his canvas bag to the ground at his feet. A hundred pounds dead weight becomes a burden to the strongest man after it has been carried for hours, and, as Baldy Burden and Jack Murfree came up beside their leader, they also deposited their loads on the earth and drew a sigh of relief.

In explanation of the exclamation of Hugh, they saw before them the broad winding current of Wild Cat Fork. Following the general route to the Yellowstone, they had reached the tributary, at a point so many miles below the scene of the explosion of the Mountain Star that nothing was to be feared from the Sioux. Moreover, the little party had long since dismissed all apprehension of the Indians who were on their side of the stream.

"That is lucky," was the comment of Jack Murfree, "for we have only to follow the course of the stream to reach Bison Rapids, from which we have a clear trail to the Yellowstone."

"But it is a long road to travel," said Baldy lugubriously; "it must be a clean hundred miles."

"It is more than that," replied Hugh, "and besides, we're on the wrong side of the river; we must find some way of getting to the other bank if we expect to make use of the trail we used in coming up the rapids."

"It isn't absolutely necessary to do that, for we can tramp the whole way——"

Jack Murfree abruptly ceased speaking. As he stood on the bank of the stream he was looking along the shore to the northward. Some object caught his eye, and he walked rapidly for a dozen paces.

"It is better to be born lucky than rich," was his declaration, as he beckoned his friends to join him.

Each leaving his precious canvas bag where it lay hurried to his side.

They quickly learned what interested the young man. Half the framework of the wrecked Mountain Star had lodged against the bank. Being composed wholly of wood, and freed from the boiler, engine, and iron work, it was buoyant and capable of supporting the men and their treasure.

It was a piece of good fortune indeed and greatly raised the spirits of the party. The next thing done was to cut a long pole apiece, with the aid of their knives. Then the bags were deposited in the concave side, the three carefully balanced themselves, and skilfully using the poles, pushed off into deep water.

The raft was laden with all it could carry, and it required the utmost care to preserve their balance. There was something impressive in the consciousness that the lost Mountain Star, even in its ruin and destruction, was still serving them.

But floating down stream by night proved a more difficult task than any one suspected. When they had twice narrowly escaped overturning by striking a rock, it was agreed that the best course was to go ashore and rest until morning. Accordingly, the raft was worked to the left bank, the gold lifted out, and, thoroughly tired and exhausted, all lay down and slept soundly until the sun was again shining.

When they awoke they were famishing and the broken hull was gone. They thought, when they lay down, that it was drawn far enough up the bank to remain, but the current had worked it loose, and it was to serve them no further.

However, it was not a matter of great importance, for they were on the right side of the river, and had only to persevere to reach the Yellowstone in time. The tramp was a long and exhausting one, but they were rugged and strong, and, though at night they felt the need of their blankets, they could get along without them by lying close and securing the mutual warmth from one another's bodies.

Since they were in a country abounding with game, it did not take Montana Hugh long to shoot an antelope, from which they made a toothsome and nourishing meal, and, while the day was still young, they shouldered their valuable burdens and resumed the march toward the southeast.

Although they used the river as their guide, the roughness of the ground compelled them frequently to diverge from it. In one instance this was caused by the sight of a party of Indians on the other shore who acted as if they intended to cross over and pay the white men a call. The latter, however, were not yearning for their company and got out of the neighborhood as speedily as possible. A study of the group satisfied Montana Hugh that they did not belong to the Wusserman branch of the Sioux, and their appearance therefore caused little alarm.

On the second night, when the wearied party nestled down behind a protecting boulder, shivering with cold despite the warmth of the day, they heard a faint but steady murmur below them which they knew was not caused by the natural flow of Wild Cat Fork.

"It's Bison Rapids," was the remark of Montana Hugh, made in such a tone that his companions were convinced of the truth of the words.

"Thank heaven for that!" was the fervent exclamation of Jack Murfree; "this wearisome tramp is pretty nearly over."

"I hope so, but don't be too sartin; we may miss the Explorer and Captain Adams; they don't go much further up the Yallerstone, and if we can't find a canoe or the means to build a raft we shall have another long tramp to Fort Walling."

Following the custom of themselves when in that section, all lay down without any one acting as sentinel. They would have slept late had they not been roused in a startling manner. Sound as was their slumber, their experience had taught them to awake at the slightest disturbance, and as the three did so simultaneously and grasped their rifles, they knew that it was the tramp of feet that had disturbed them.

Before they could investigate the cause, an unearthly braying caused them to leap up and hurry to the left toward a slight slope of the ground.

That which had alarmed them was one of their own mules that was cropping the grass near, when in mere animal enjoyment he tried his voice, with a success that drove away sleep from every person or other animal within range of hearing.

The four hybrids, having been left to themselves for more than a week, had luxuriated on the succulent pasturage that was on every hand. They were so fat and well conditioned indeed that it required an hour's skilful maneuvering before three of them were corralled. After they were once secured, however, the men took care that no opportunity was given them to get away.

With the pieces of harness left behind bridles were constructed, and each man vaulted upon a glossy back, the contents of his canvas bag so divided that it was firmly secured in place across the spine in front of the rider. The fourth mule was left behind.

Kicking their heels against the ribs of the animals, they went jolting down the trail, hardly being allowed to pause until they reached the banks of the Yellowstone, where they were turned loose to spend the rest of their lives in luxurious idleness.

The good fortune which had accompanied our friends did not desert them at this point in their journey. On the second day of their waiting, the welcome whistle of the Explorer awoke the echoes along the Yellowstone, and the steamer itself soon swung into sight, and, answering the signals of the three, turned to shore and took them aboard.

The story that our friends had to tell was an interesting one indeed, and excited the wonderment and congratulations of their old acquaintances on the trading steamer. Plans were formed for another visit to Dead Man's Mine, but when all the difficulties and dangers were understood, the project was abandoned, and, so far as known, the attempt which was so successful with the party whose adventures we have related has never been repeated, and, except among a few old trappers and hunters the existence of the strange deposit of gold at Dead Man's Mine seems to have faded from the recollection of man.

A SOLDIER AND A GENTLEMAN.*

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

A tale of stirring adventure in many lands and in which men of four nations play prominent parts—The duel in rowboats on the ocean and what interference on behalf of fair play brought upon the American—More than one case of “out of the frying pan into the fire.”

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

While cruising off the coast of Spain in the yacht *Nomad*, Standish, an American, and the Earl of Rockstave witness a duel. An unknown Russian, who is accused of a liaison with the wife of Don Carlos Arteaga, fights the don's brother, Captain Arteaga. A foul play causes Standish and the earl to interfere. The Russian, who is wounded, is taken on board the *Nomad*, while his second, Lieutenant Bergelot, fights a duel with Crombet, who in a dastardly fashion had shot at the Russian.

CHAPTER V.—“WE SHALL MEET AGAIN.”

CROMBET was becoming exasperated. There was a cool, mocking smile on the face of the Frenchman, that was well calculated to rouse his opponent's rage. At last, with a curse, the Spaniard rushed at the calm Frenchman, using his utmost strength to break down his guard and slay him at once. The Frenchman coolly met his onslaught—parried—thrust—and the Spaniard was writhing on the deck with the blood flowing from a wound over—and in—the heart.

There was an instantaneous hush. The full significance of what had been done now came to every one of the group. The only person wholly unmoved on the deck of the Spanish yacht was, I think, Abdullah the Moor. If his master had carved the other to pieces, or had been carved to pieces, I doubt if that inscrutable mask Abdullah called a face would have evinced surprise or even interest.

Lord Rockstave was the first to break the awed silence.

“We are satisfied,” he said calmly.

I doubt if any one but an Englishman could have said that as Rockstave said it. Had an American made the same remark in the same tone, it would have been set down as the bluster and bluff of a young nation of would be heroes.

But coming from Rockstave, it fell with significant meaning on the ears of the white faced Spaniards. There was no fear of consequences—no doubt of future security—in Rockstave's manner. He spoke with the air of a man who had been instrumental in punishing a wicked enemy, and now that the enemy was well punished, proposed to dismiss the thing from his mind.

*This story began in the February issue of THE ARGOSY, which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.

"Come, Standish," he said. "Bergelot is ready. I understand that he is to go aboard the *Nomad*."

"Certainly, he cannot remain here," I said. "But is there no more to be said? Are we to have no understanding about the secrecy of this thing?"

"Secrecy! Why should we beg secrecy?" replied Rockstave. "We are in need of no secrecy. I fancy, though, our friends would desire to have it understood that nothing will be said about this—and the other."

The Marquis de Villegas had given hasty orders about the prostrate and dying Crombet, and now came toward us. His face was ghastly in its whiteness. He was struggling to maintain a calmness he did not feel. I felt that if he dared, he would have slain Rockstave, Bergelot, and myself, before we ever set foot off his yacht.

"Señors, I regret this occurrence," he said. "It is true, as Lord Rockstave has said, we wish the matter to remain a secret. You will understand that, of course. No one wishes a thing like this known. I may trust you, then, señors, to keep the matter to yourselves?"

"Oh, there is no reason why we should speak of it," said Rockstave. "There is no reason at all. It is not so great an achievement. But allow me to ask how you are to keep it secret. How will you account for the death of Crombet?"

"Lieutenant Crombet was to have left for Cuba tomorrow," said the marquis. "It will be easy to—leave that to me, señor. I have your promise."

"You have mine," said Rockstave.

"And mine," I added, "though I shall watch you and your friends when I see them, Marquis de Villegas."

The marquis shot a glance of vindictive hate toward me.

"You are determined we shall be enemies, señor," he said with a bow.

"Let it be so if you will. Yet you will learn when it is too late that your interest would have been served better by retaining me as a friend. Had this affair terminated more happily I was to make a most important and pleasing disclosure to you. As it is, since you have chosen to be by enemy, I refrain. You will learn it in time—and you will wish that the Marquis de Villegas was your friend."

I bowed.

"Señor," said the marquis, turning to the Frenchman, "you have been victorious and have killed an officer of Spain. If this is a matter of congratulation to you, make the most of it. But rest assured that you have not seen the last of it."

"Bah!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "You——"

"That will do, Bergelot," said Rockstave, putting a heavy hand on the Frenchman's shoulder. "You have done enough for today. You have nobly avenged the attempt to kill your friend. I think you need demand no further satisfaction."

"Any satisfaction——" began the marquis.

"No," said Rockstave, waving him to silence. "Lieutenant Bergelot is amply satisfied. As for my American friend and myself, we are well enough pleased to let things stand as they are."

"Very well—as you will," said the marquis, biting his lip.

"Lieutenant Bergelot," I said, "call the Moor. He stands like a piece of bronze. Has he any life in him?"

"Life! Abdullah! Well, monsieur, you should see him in a fight. Abdullah, follow."

The stately Moor moved across the deck, and I thought that his garb was ill fitted to display the graceful movements. The flowing burnouse would have been much more to my taste. And as I watched him I saw a quick gleam of fire leap from his coal black eyes, and a glance of intelligence passed between him and—the Marquis de Villegas.

"Ha! Ha!" I said to myself. "The Moor has been tampered with. I must tell Bergelot to beware."

The marquis attended us to the companion with stately ceremony. His bows were the lowest, his smile the most polite. But I knew there was murder in his heart.

"We shall meet again, Señor Standish," he said.

"Till then, farewell," I said indifferently.

My own sailors had been eager watchers of the scene, having clambered to the deck from the boat. They now took their places, and we regained the deck of the Nomad.

"By Jove! To tell the truth, Standish, I am glad we are out of it," said Rockstave, when the steward had taken the Frenchman to a stateroom. "I began to think it was the beginning of a war of extermination. Fortunately the Frenchman was satisfied. But there's murder yet to follow. I fancy we have all made enemies that will show their hands sooner or later. What did the marquis mean by his remarks to you? Why should you and he be friends?"

"I'm blessed if I know," I answered. "I'm sure I don't want him for a friend. He said the same thing to me during our first conversation. I paid no attention to it. I can't think what he meant—and, to tell the truth, I don't care. I wonder where Bergelot wants to drop off."

At this moment the courageous Frenchman appeared on deck. He had refreshed himself with plenty of cold water, and one would not have supposed to look at him that he had just been in a duel to the death.

"Ah, messieurs! I feel like a new man. It is quite invigorating to kill your man so easily. Pah! That fellow was a crumb. But the marquis! Ah! I'd like to cross swords with him."

"All crossing of swords is ended for the present, my friend," I said. "I have just concerned myself to wonder where you wish to go. Please look upon the yacht as being at your disposal. Where shall we drop you?"

"Is monsieur intending to stop at any port in France?" he asked.

"We are going to Havre, where we shall leave the yacht for a visit to Paris," I answered. "However, our destination need not be yours. Name the port you wish, and I will give the command."

"I accept, monsieur," he said. "You may land me at Cadiz."

"Cadiz!" exclaimed Rockstave. "You surely will not return to Cadiz! You take your life in your hands."

"The life of a soldier in Algiers is always in his hands—or out of them," said Bergelot. "Really, I fear nothing in Cadiz."

"Nor anywhere," I put in. "Well, if you will have it so, we will land you at Cadiz."

"Thank you, monsieur."

"And the Russian?" said Rockstave. "You are forgetting your other guest, Standish."

"Not at all," I said. "While you were arranging with the marquis on board the yacht, Bergelot and I came to an understanding about our friend Godtchorkna. He is, it appears, under some kind of a cloud, the nature of which Bergelot is not at liberty to divulge."

"In short, he is a mysterious Russian—as they all are. Bergelot has my promise that Godtchorkna shall remain on board the yacht until he has fully recovered from his wounds, and is again able to cope with his many enemies."

Rockstave glanced quickly at Bergelot and me as if he doubted the wisdom of this arrangement. But he said nothing.

"I am hungry," I said. "No doubt both of you are nearly famished. The steward has perhaps been so busy with the Russian he has forgotten that it is time for lunch. I will see."

"Don't trouble, sir," said Captain Wilkins, coming toward me, and over-hearing my remark. "Lunch is now served. The Russian is asleep. He will soon recover. There is nothing dangerous about his wounds. You had a lively scrimmage on the other yacht."

"Could you see?"

"With the glass, very well. The Spaniard was never in it from the first. I would not like to meet that Frenchman as an enemy."

The Frenchman did not look very formidable a few moments later, as he sat at the table in the dining saloon and told stories of his life in Algiers. If the Russian was weighted down with a great mystery, there was none about the Frenchman.

He was as gay and lighthearted as though he had not just killed a man. He was a born soldier of fortune. He was ready for anything. If France had not a place like Algiers to send him, where he would have some kind of excitement, he would, I have no doubt, have taken service under another flag and sought the life he loved in Asia or where the crash of war was loudest.

"We must not forget the little packet," I said, taking from my pocket the package he had given me before the duel. "I am rejoiced that the duty shall not be mine to inform Mademoiselle Victorine that you died a hero."

"Ah?" said Rockstave, "is there a mademoiselle?"

"There is indeed," said the Frenchman. "I don't mind telling you, messieurs, that Mademoiselle Victorine Ravary will soon become my wife. Only a lieutenant? Oh, yes. It is true I have a little something else. One could not marry a colonel's daughter on the pay of a lieutenant."

"I congratulate you," said Rockstave, "both on having something beside your pay and on winning Mademoiselle Victorine. Colonel Ravary is in command at Algiers, is he not?"

"He is colonel of the guard. You know him, monsieur?"

"No—I have heard of him. A dashing officer—no wonder he accepts you as a son in law."

"Accept my thanks, monsieur."

"I must tell you something, Bergelot," I said, after we had chatted on pleasanter subjects awhile. "I don't like that Moor of yours. I saw on board the Spanish yacht a look of intelligence pass from him to the marquis. Is there anything between them, do you think?"

"Ah! You did see that? Are you sure, monsieur?"

"Quite sure. I was so struck with it that I resolved to put you on your guard against treachery."

"Abdullah is a rascal," said Bergelot. "I have kept him because he fears nothing—not even me. I cannot see, though—ah! Can it be Victorine he would strike?"

"Has Abdullah an enmity for Victorine?"

"No, but the Spaniard—to hurt me. You do not know this Spanish clique as well as I do, monsieur," he said. "It is a crowd of the most dangerous men in Spain. There is the Marquis de Villegas, Captain Rafael Arteaga, the man who fought with Godtchorkna, Don Carlos Arteaga, high in the diplomatic service, Count de Palma, a nobleman who lives much in Paris, and others."

"If you make one of this crowd your enemy, you must fight them all. I tell you this to warn you, messieurs. It is quite possible that some of them have already put on foot a plot against Victorine. She is a most beautiful girl."

"I trust you will not find it so," I said. "Perhaps it is more a conspiracy against yourself."

"Quite likely," said Rockstave.

"*Parbleu!* They have cause enough for that. I have had the pleasure, messieurs, of killing two of them."

Truly, this Frenchman loved fighting. I fancy he loved fighting as much as he loved Victorine.

Having finished our lunch, we visited the Russian, who was by that time awake and eating his own.

"Boris," said Bergelot. "Monsieur Standish is a true gentleman. He requests that you remain his guest until your wounds are healed. He has asked no explanation—demands no confidences. I leave it with you to tell him what you will."

"I have told nothing. You are safe on board this splendid yacht, and are fortunate in finding friends like Messieurs the Earl and Standish. By the way, I've just killed Crombet!"

The deep, inscrutable eyes looked up at the Frenchman in something like surprise.

"You, Bergelot! You have just killed Crombet!"

"On the yacht, in a square duel. These gentlemen stood by me."

A faint smile played on the Russian's handsome face. He held out his hand to me.

"I thank you, M. Standish. It is most unfortunate that at this moment

I cannot repay your kindness with more confidence. But in time—in time——”

A fire blazed in his eyes. I wondered if he were a nihilist.

But he did not look like any nihilist I had ever seen. There was a patrician strain in him—that was certain. Yet many of Russia's nobles are nihilists. But then again, Bergelot, an officer of France, would not be harboring and abetting a nihilist. I gave the problem up, resolved to abide by my promise to Bergelot and let the Russian tell me his secret or not, as he chose.

The yacht put into Cadiz. In the harbor we saw the Spanish yacht, but none of her guests. We bade Bergelot farewell, and received his enthusiastic thanks again and again as he pressed our hands at parting.

“I trust you will find Victorine well,” I said.

“Yes,” said Rockstave, holding up the glass he was drinking the parting toast from. “Here's to Victorine and her Victor.”

“Ah!” murmured Bergelot. “And I am only Dulon.”

He left us at last, and the Nomad once more started toward Havre.

“Now for some of our own affairs,” said Rockstave. “I feel as though I did not want to see another Spaniard in a year.”

“And yet we are going toward one—my beautiful stepmother,” I said.

“Dona Estella! By Jove!” said Rockstave. “I wonder if the strange remarks of the marquis had anything to do with her.”

CHAPTER VI.—SOMETHING WRONG IN THE FAMILY.

BEFORE we reached Havre the Russian left his berth and sat on deck with us during a portion of a bright, cheerful day.

He was a picturesque object, with his right arm in a sling and his head well done up in a white cloth. His handsome face was somewhat pale, though we, who had not known him previous to his duel, could not tell how much paler than usual he really was.

He was an interesting companion, and inclined to converse freely so long as the subject introduced was not himself. At every mention of his own affairs he drew into himself and became silent.

I fancied that at these times he seemed more to avoid Rockstave's keen interest than anything I might say or do. Whether he had heard Rockstave say he knew his face, or whether, being a Russian, he naturally distrusted an Englishman more than an American, I do not know.

But this much was certain. When he spoke to me in reply to a question or remark of mine, his countenance was frank enough to please the most suspicious of men. But when he spoke directly to Rockstave there was an evident effort to retain a mask—a glimpse in his manner of distrust or some kindred emotion, of which, of course, there was no explanation.

At Havre we left him sitting on deck smoking a cigar.

“I trust, Godtchorkna,” I said to him, before Rockstave and I stepped into the boat that was waiting for us, “I trust that you will make yourself perfectly comfortable and at home on board till I return. I assure you that you will please me by so doing.

"I must go to Paris and see my sister, after which I may take a run to America. You will remain on board, of course. That, I believe, is your own wish."

"Thank you, M. Standish. Your hospitality and kindness are beyond any I have ever experienced. Some day I hope the opportunity may come to me to repay all."

"Nonsense," I said. "I only hope you will remain for a good voyage."

"Unfortunately," said Rockstave, who had all along been slightly stiff with the Russian, "I cannot accompany you on this voyage to America. My own affairs in England have been too long neglected."

"Ah," said the Russian, a peculiar flash showing for an instant in his eyes, "then I must bid you adieu, Lord Rockstave?"

"Oh," said Rockstave, seemingly fighting against his British bluntness and coldness, "I hope to meet you again soon. Friends who meet as we have done, do not forget. I may join you when the Nomad returns from America. Yes, I think I may promise to see you and Standish then."

The earl had apparently forgotten something, for with a "wait a minute, Standish," he started down the companion to the lower deck. The Russian stepped to my side and grasped my hand.

"Pardon me," he said. "In the presence of your friend I am under a restraint. I cannot explain this—I am a Russian, and he an Englishman. I like him, yet—but he is your friend and has been mine. I wish to say this, however: Your kindness in asking no questions—in accepting me with no explanations—is a marvel of generosity."

"To say I thank you would be to feebly utter the sentiments I feel. Perhaps—when you return to the yacht alone—I will tell you the story of my life. It is your due—you have been my friend. I am grateful! Ah! I hope the time may come when I can show you how grateful I am."

"Pshaw!" I said. "It is nothing."

"Nothing! It is my life!"

Rockstave soon appeared, and we shook hands with the Russian.

"Wilkins has his instructions," I said to Godtchorkna. "If any one visits the yacht you are to be secured from all intrusion."

He gripped my hand and murmured some words I did not catch.

Neither Rockstave nor I spoke of the Russian in the presence of the sailors who were rowing the boat. And upon our reaching the pier we had enough to think of. It was not until we were seated in a railway carriage on the way to Paris that we mentioned him.

"What do you think of the Russian?" I asked. "How does he strike you?"

Rockstave laughed. "Oh," he said, "you mean the Cossack?"

"He is no Cossack," I answered. "But there is a certain antagonism between you. I have seen it today and yesterday. What does it mean?"

Rockstave smiled again. I don't think I have mentioned it before, but Lord Rockstave was a singularly handsome young man—about twenty four years of age—tall, broad shouldered, a typical British aristocrat. Since he and I had been comrades on so many hunting trips there was a bond of friend-

ship between us that amounted to brotherly love, and more than that sometimes is.

"What I mean is," said Rockstave, "that if you scratch that calm and polished exterior, you will find a Cossack. But he is not so singular in that. The polish of any one of us is none too deep. You or I could develop some of the instincts of our savage ancestors if we were bitten hard."

"You think he is a man to be distrusted, then?" I asked.

"No—I think quite the contrary. That antagonism you saw—or supposed you saw between us, was not antagonism at all. The fellow's face is familiar to me. I certainly have met him. But Godtchorkna is not his name. I should remember that had I heard it before.

"No, he is traveling under an assumed name. I was trying to penetrate the mystery, and he was trying to foil me. That's all the antagonism there was. My dear fellow, every man in Russia has some kind of a mystery about him.

"They are either striving to escape Siberia themselves or are helping some one else to escape—or go there. I don't attach much importance to the mystery business. He is a good fellow evidently, and well educated. He speaks Spanish, French, and English as well as we do, besides his own awful jaw breaking language."

"Then you think I have not made a mistake in giving him the freedom of the yacht?"

Rockstave shrugged his shoulders.

"Mistake? What harm can he do? Suppose he was a Nihilist—which he is not, I'll wager—he could not steal the yacht or blow it up without Wilkins or some of the men catching him at it."

"He certainly is a mysterious fellow," I said. "I fancy, with what the marquis said about the cause of the duel, that there is a woman mixed up with it."

"Probably," said Rockstave. "There is a woman in every Russian mystery."

We soon found other subjects to occupy our thoughts.

"I shall speak to your father before I leave Paris," said Rockstave. "And I shall ascertain if your sister Edna is in a mood to accept."

I laughed outright.

"Rockstave," I said, "you will never make a lover. You are too British. Of course I would not tell Edna, but I confess your manner of going about this affair is much like buying a horse. Have you ever thought that a girl likes to be kissed and made up to before the great question is asked?"

"Our way of looking at it," said Rockstave, "is that the man who does the kissing before he asks the question is a cad and a scoundrel, and deserves a whipping."

"I suppose you are right," I answered. "But many don't think so. Any how, I fancy it won't make much difference to you. I cannot imagine Edna ever allowing any one to kiss her. She's rather peculiar, Edna is."

"Yes," said Rockstave, looking out of the window. "She has peculiarities. She is peculiarly beautiful, for one thing. She is peculiarly stylish, for

another. She is peculiarly gifted, for a third. She is peculiarly unfortunate in having me fall in love with her, for a——”

“Oh, drop that. You are not blind to the advantages of a marriage with yourself any more than I am. An earl, with one of the grandest seats in England, and a rent roll of ten thousand pounds a year, is a great catch for any girl, however rich or nobly born. The thing is, Edna cares nothing about those things. She would marry a hod carrier if she loved him.”

“And would not marry——”

“An earl if she did not love him.”

Rockstave breathed hard, and I was much surprised. He was so calm in general that I was totally unprepared for anything like sentiment. To have him ask, to have Edna accept, and to have the thing done properly and with the usual chic, would have seemed natural.

But here was this man, who faced lions, tigers, wounded elephants, without flinching, who stood like a rock when a hundred savages menaced our lives, sighing over a girl less than twenty years of age.

You might ask how this surprised me when I loved Inez so. But I was different, and Inez was different. Rockstave was a man absolutely of iron. I was a fellow who howled his joy or swore his rage on occasion.

Edna was a girl who was beautiful, proud, and stylish. Inez was a little tender thing, who wound her arms around my neck and held her lips up to be kissed in a way that would melt even Rockstave.

We arrived in Paris rather late in the day, and went at once to the mansion occupied by my father. We reached there in time for dinner.

On my return from all former trips—trips that had kept me absent two or three months or longer—I had been welcomed to the bosom of my family, whether in New York or elsewhere, somewhat in this manner: My father would clasp my hand and make a show of affection, which he had felt once—before he married Dona Estella.

Edna, my lovely sister, would rush to me, throw her arms around me, and kiss me and ask if I was well. Dona Estella would smile her sweetest smile—which certainly was sweet—and welcome me in pretty Spanish or French, or even in the lisping English she sometimes essayed.

But this homecoming was different. I say homecoming—I had become accustomed to think any place home where they were stopping. My father seemed out of sorts and greeted me coolly. Dona Estella held her hand for me to kiss—and Rockstave as well, and spoke words of welcome. But there was a paleness about her face, and a fire in her eye that told me to beware.

And Edna! The dear girl looked white and worn, and almost trembled as I held her in my arms. And I thought that the glance she gave Rockstave as she welcomed him was—could I be mistaken—a look of appeal and love.

That first meal was at first rather awkward. But the restraint soon wore off, and we chatted about the hunting trip.

“We are intending to visit the opera this evening,” said Dona Estella to me. “Will you and your friend not accompany us?”

“Who is going?” I asked.

"Your father, Edna, and myself."

I was on the point of saying yes, when I chanced to look at Edna. She shook her head in a quick, decisive way, and dropped her eyes. I knew the message meant more than I could understand, but I read far enough to decline the opera.

"You will be quite a party," I replied. "I think I must decline this evening. I shall be engaged elsewhere till quite late."

"Ah," said my stepmother. The subject was dropped.

My father seemed uneasy, and I began to mistrust that for some reason or other I had come home at a most inopportune time—or, perhaps, when I learned the truth—an opportune one.

Edna developed a severe headache, and went to bed. Rockstave remained impassive, mum as a clam, understanding very well that there was a little play going on.

"I think, Drake," he said, after we had smoked a cigar with my father, "that you told Somerville we would be on hand early."

Now Somerville was a creature of Rockstave's imagination. But he had heard me speak of an engagement, knew I had none, so had kindly invented one for me.

I rose, and we began preparations to go out. As I was passing through the hall I met a young English maid who was Edna's favorite.

"Sir," she whispered, "Miss Edna wishes you would return after the others have gone."

"All right," I answered, and passed out.

"What's up?" asked Rockstave bluntly, when we reached the pavement. "The house is upset. A blind man could see that strings were tightly drawn there. Your father nervous and testy, Dona Estella wickedly nice, and Edna half washed away with tears. What's up?"

"I don't know," I replied, "but we will both know soon enough. Edna wants me back when the governor and his dona have gone."

We strolled a short distance away, then back, and watched the door. The carriage drove to the curb, and my father, courtly with all his sixty odd years, came out, attending Dona Estella. They got into the carriage and were driven away.

"Come!" I said. "Let's get back and see what this dire mystery is."

We were admitted by a footman, and at once went into the drawingroom.

"Pardon me," said Rockstave. "I will retire to the smoking room."

"Go in the library," I said. "Smoke all you like."

I had not been alone more than three minutes when Edna came gliding into the room. She rushed up to me, and fairly threw herself upon me and hugged me.

"Oh, Drake!" she said, sobbing; "oh, Drake, oh, Drake! I'm so miserable. What shall I do? What can I do? I am so glad you have come."

"Easy there," I said, sitting down and drawing her to me. "Tell me all about it. Has any one been abusing you?"

"No—no—not that—but they are going—going—to make—me marry a Spaniard."

"The deuce! Make you? Make an American girl marry a man she doesn't want? I guess not. But who is he? Is he a good fellow?"

"I'm sure he is not. I hear his name here and there—in ways one would not like to hear her husband spoken of. He is the Marquis de Villegas. Did you ever hear of him?"

A long, low whistle of amazement escaped my lips.

"The Marquis de Villegas! That rascal!" I exclaimed. "By Heaven! You shall not marry him."

"But they say I must!" she cried. "Papa is entirely under the control of his wife. What can I do? What can I do? Oh, I hate him and fear him so."

"Let's think about this," I said. "This is the nineteenth century, so there is no fear of a gang attacking the house and carrying you off. We must stop this somehow. I will have a talk with the governor tonight when he returns."

"I will kill myself rather than marry him," she said. "Oh! I could not. I hate him so."

"But why do they make you do it? What's the game?"

"I don't understand. The Count de Palma, who is cousin to the marquis, is a great friend of Dona Estella—too great a friend, I suspect.

"Oh, there is some treachery on foot, I know. I am so glad you came back. You can fight them when I could not. But even you are only one against many."

"I reckon there are two," I said. "There's Rockstave."

There was a convulsive movement of the lithe body pressed close to mine, and a blush appeared on Edna's pale cheeks.

"What!" I cried in a sort of ecstasy. "Is it Rockstave?"

She buried her burning face in my bosom.

"Don't tell him!" she said. "I'd die rather than let him know. I have liked him from the first time I met him."

"Well!" I said. "This makes it as plain as day. You can't marry the marquis, because you are going to marry the earl."

She shuddered.

"Oh, hush!" she said. "He may hear you."

"If he doesn't it will be because I have no tongue," I said with my usual splendid faculty for blundering. I rose to call Rockstave. When I returned Edna was gone.

"What is it?" asked Rockstave, coming into the room.

"What the deuce do you think is up!" I asked.

"Can't say. Murder? You look it."

"Worse. They are trying to marry Edna to the Marquis de Villegas."

A look of dumb surprise came into Rockstave's face.

"And we didn't kill him when we had the chance!" he said.

"Edna was here—I thought—she——"

"You are losing your wits," said Rockstave. "Edna does not love the marquis."

"Hates him."

"Is there any one else?"

"None—that I know of," I said, thinking better of my foolish resolve to precipitate matters between them.

"Then I am in the field. I wonder if she will see me."

"Don't know—she's queer, you know. Send up and see."

I left Rockstave to his own devices, and went out to smoke. My nerves needed a cigar now.

I heard Rockstave speak to a servant. Heavens! He was standing where I had been when I was talking with Edna, and I was sitting where he had been. The rooms were not far apart. If I could hear what he said he could have heard what we said. The wooden faced Briton had no doubt heard every word of Edna's confession, and had not let on.

"Take this message to Miss Standish," I heard him say. "Ask her if she will kindly see her old friend Rockstave."

In ten minutes I heard a timid step in the hall. I took a sly look—it was Edna. Her face was now calm. She must have known that I had not betrayed her secret.

"Miss Standish—Edna—" I heard Rockstave say, in the same calm, steady voice. "From what Drake has told me, there is little time for me to make my playing against the powers. Drake has told me the plans that have been made for you.

"There is every reason why those plans should be defeated. Selfishness on my part is one reason. I love you—I have loved you silently a long time. My time has not been spent as much in drawingrooms as in forests.

"I am poorly equipped with words with which to tell my love. It is my first attempt. Perhaps with practice I may improve. I love you with as honest a love as a man ever gave to a woman. I offer you my heart, my hand, my name. You are wealthier than I, but I am rich enough to escape the suspicion of being a fortune hunter. Will you be my wife—the Countess of Rockstave?"

Well, I did not hear the answer. The fact that they were in there a half hour mumbling something to themselves was enough for me.

When my father and Dona Estella returned from the opera they were accompanied by a Spanish gentleman of proud bearing, about the age of Dona Estella. He presented a marked contrast to my father's old frame and white hair.

"The Count de Palma," said Dona Estella, introducing us.

"I am pleased to make the acquaintance of Señor Standish," said the count.

There was a gleam in his eye that did not escape me. I did not doubt that he had heard all about the duels. Rockstave was also introduced, and his steady unflinching eyes squarely met the black ones of the count. We four, my father, the count, Rockstave and myself, sat smoking and drinking wine after the dona had supposedly retired.

"The count is cousin to the Marquis de Villegas," said my father suavely, indicating De Palma, and looking at me. "Perhaps, Drake, you are not yet aware of it. But your sister Edna is soon to marry the marquis."

There was dead silence for the space of a minute.

"I'll be hanged if she is," I blurted out. "That scoundrel! Let me tell you something. Edna is soon to marry the Earl of Rockstave."

CHAPTER VII.—EDNA GIVES DRAKE A SURPRISE.

HAD a bomb exploded in the room the effects of the explosion could scarcely have exceeded the effects of my little speech. My father sank back in his chair and sat looking at me in a sort of gasping stupor, as if I had made a statement far beyond his powers of understanding.

Rockstave, who had been as cordial as an Englishman can be with strangers, and had just replied to the count, at once became wooden. Only the Spaniard preserved the outward semblance of polite self command.

"Señor," he said to Rockstave, "will you join me on the porch? It is a fine night." Then, as Rockstave rose to accompany him, I heard him add, "This seems to be a family affair. I doubt even if you, interested as you are, wish to engage in the discussion."

It was, of course, a most delicate position to put Rockstave in. And I knew the man detested anything like a domestic scene. He could face dangers that seemed overwhelming, if the remedy was with gun or sword. But when it came to the niceties of polite discussion, covering rancor with diplomacy, Rockstave was too blunt and bold to feel at ease.

The two walked out of the room, and my father sprang at me in fury.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "How dare you make that statement in the face of my information that your sister is engaged to the Marquis de Villegas? What nonsensical scheme is this you have returned from Africa with? Explain! For Heaven's sake explain."

"I will explain," I returned, almost as hotly as he had spoken. "It requires little explanation, but you are welcome to all there is. The scheme, as you call it, seems to be on the other side. I left here about four months ago, leaving my sister a happy, bright eyed girl. So far as I know nothing had occurred to mar her life. I return and find her wasted and wan. Her heart is broken. The proud spirit that once made her so glorious is crushed.

"And for what! To gratify some whim of your delightful wife, who has planned to marry the girl to one of the greatest rascals on the face of the earth. I have had the pleasure of meeting this Marquis de Villegas, and I assure you, that as long as I have a tongue or an arm to prevent it, Edna shall not be compelled to marry him.

"She is in love with Rockstave—an English nobleman, richer than De Villegas, owner of Rockstave Abbey, one of the finest houses in England, brave, loyal, and in every respect a gentleman. On the other hand, she hates and fears this De Villegas, who is a scoundrel. I have met him, I say, and I know what I am saying is true."

During my somewhat lengthy speech my father had regained control of himself, and now sat white faced but calm, with a sneer on his handsome old face.

"Indeed!" he said, with a cutting emphasis. "You have grown eloquent

of late. I can scarcely realize that you have spent your time among savages and wild beasts. You are so ardent an advocate of this love—this newly born love—between Edna and Rockstave. I swear I have heard nothing of it before."

"No, you heard nothing of it," I answered, "because Rockstave hesitated to speak, and Edna is too proud a girl to allow any man to know she loves him before he has offered himself."

"Ah! Then it was tonight that the words were spoken—that the secret became public."

"It was. You can scarcely deny that Rockstave is in every way a better parti than this De Villegas."

"Rockstave is not a factor for my consideration. The Marquis de Villegas is a friend of mine—and of my wife, whom you just now saw fit to speak slightly of—and we have considered the matter to our own satisfaction. It is not necessary, I believe, for an American gentleman to explain his actions to his son."

"It may be yet, for all that," I said. "I warn you that De Villegas will never marry Edna."

"And I warn you," roared my father, now losing his temper again, "that if you persist in insulting me and my friends I will have no more of you."

"Your threat is futile," I said, growing calmer as he grew more exasperated. "As you know, I have nothing to expect from you—and want nothing. The Spanish woman who now has you under her thumb will no doubt get all you have to give. Therefore——"

"Every penny, sir! Every penny! By the Lord! Has it come to this! You insult both my wife and myself in my own house? It will cease, I tell you, sir."

"I do not wish to insult you or your wife. But I insist that this marriage between Edna and De Villegas must be dropped. I know more of this De Villegas than you do, and I know he is a scoundrel."

"What do you know, sir! You, who have spent your time in the wilds of Africa, must indeed be an authority on this point. What do you know about the marquis to his discredit?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you what I know," I answered. "But I know enough."

"You fool! You indecent liar!" yelled my father, growing red with uncontrollable anger, as he shook his finger in my face. "You dare make a charge that you cannot substantiate!"

"You tell me the marquis is a scoundrel, and cannot give one argument to prove it. Truly, things are coming to a pretty pass. What next, sir? I suppose you will refuse to meet the marquis when he comes here."

"I shall not be here when the marquis comes," I answered. "I am going to Cuba."

"Cuba! Do I hear aright! Cuba! For what, let me ask?"

My father's expression was now truly fierce, as he scowled across the table at me and awaited my reply.

"I am going to Cuba first, to see Inez Duany. I received a letter from

her just before we started for Africa, saying that she and her parents were going to New York to stay until the fighting was over.

"I learn to night, however, from Edna, that they did not go. And Edna has not heard from Inez in two months. I am alarmed about her, and am going at once to ascertain if she is in trouble."

"And what then?" snarled my father. "Suppose she is in trouble as you say? A pauper! The daughter of a farmer in a ruined island! What then?"

"If I can find her, she will become my wife. Then she will no longer be a pauper."

This information nearly deprived my father of the power of speech. He gasped two or three times, then turned upon me again furiously.

"Ah! Ah!" he said. "This is truly a delectable scheme! You will marry the Cuban, and Edna will marry the Englishman, and neither I nor your stepmother may be permitted to advise. I like this, sir, I do indeed. As for yourself, you are your own master."

"Your fortune is in your own hands. I have no control over you. Therefore, you are at liberty to marry whom you please. But, thank God! Edna's fortune is not yet where I cannot control it. She is still under age, and I am her legal guardian as well as father. I say she shall not marry your Lord Rockstave, and she shall marry the Marquis de Villegas."

"I say she shall not!" I retorted.

My father rose from his chair.

"Enough of this," he said in a voice nearly choked with rage. "I may be old, but I am not yet in my dotage. I will not be brow beaten in this way by you. You defy me, you set at naught my wishes. You persist in running after a Cuban girl when I have requested you to desist."

"You now dare to say you will thwart this plan of ours to find a noble and wealthy husband for Edna. You have entered my house as an enemy. Therefore leave it at once. Go! I wish to have no more to do with you. Go to Cuba if you will. Find your pauper and marry her. But do not come near me again. You are no longer a son of mine."

"But, father," I said, "the Marquis De——"

"Enough! I will hear no more. The marquis is my friend. Begone!"

There was now no reasoning with him. His rage had become so inflamed that I saw we could have no reconciliation.

"I will go," I said. "I ask your permission to bid Edna farewell."

"No," he said. "I do not wish there to be any more poison put into her head. She shall obey me, and the less you see her the better."

"I regret this," I said, "and some day you will regret it. As you have sent me away—declared war, so to speak—I will say this, that Edna will never marry the Marquis de Villegas."

My father's face became purple.

"Will you go!" he demanded. "Oh will it become necessary for me to call men to put my own son out of my house?"

"It will not," I said. "Understand, I care nothing for your command to go. I care for no one in this house but Edna. I warn you and your Spanish fellow conspirators against any plots while I am away."

"Will you go!"

"I am going. Lord Rockstave came here as my guest, and must of necessity leave with me. You are too angry now to be aware of the affront you are offering to a gentleman."

"Will you go?"

"I am going. I shall acquaint Lord Rockstave with the facts."

I stepped out to the porch to find Rockstave. As I passed through a door that had been partially open, I caught a glimpse of a white gown that whisked out of sight into another room at my approach.

I did not doubt that Dona Estella or some one in her behalf had been eavesdropping. I cared little for that, however, and hurried on to find Rockstave. I found him and the count strolling near the porch, to all appearances, engaged in friendly conversation.

"Rockstave," I said, "a word with you. Beg pardon, count."

Rockstave came toward me.

"I have had words with my father," I said, "and he has ordered me from the house. I thought I'd tell you."

"Yes, yes, old fellow; that's right," he said. "I'll be ready in a minute."

He followed me in, and we met my father in the hall.

"Mr. Standish," said Rockstave, in a steady, manly voice, "I regret that we have not met under circumstances more happy. I fear you will not be pleased to listen to what I have to say, yet I cannot go without telling you what has been on my mind to tell you for some time. I love your daughter. It was my intention to ask your permission to pay my addresses to her, and, if she would accept, to make her my wife."

Even my father, enraged though he was, could not but see the manliness and honor in this statement of Rockstave's.

"Sir," said my father, "I regret that you have spoken. The hand of my daughter is already promised to one who loves her well. She may be a little romantic in her ideas, and may think she prefers another, but that will in time pass away. I regret that this unpleasant episode has taken place while you were my guest. I mean no offense to you, sir. My son and I have not met on good terms. You and I may, nevertheless, part friends."

"I trust so," said Rockstave, offering his hand. "May I be permitted to see Miss Standish before I go?"

"I prefer not," answered my father. "Things have gone too far now."

Rockstave bowed. That ended the conversation, and we were soon out in the street.

"Well, really, we have made a mess of it," said Rockstave. "The old gentleman was angry enough to eat you."

"Oh, he will come round," I said. "The only thing I regret is that I must go to Cuba."

"Cuba! What takes you to Cuba?"

"It seems that my supposition that Inez was in New York all this time was incorrect. She wrote to me some months ago that she and her parents were going to New York. I did not dream of a change in their plans. But Edna tells me they did not go."

"She received a letter shortly after we went to Africa, telling her that they had decided to remain on the plantation called Buena Fortuna, near Matanzas, until peace had been restored. Since then Edna has heard nothing. Peace is apparently farther off than ever. I feel anxious about Inez, and must go over at once."

"Of course. And you feel anxious about Edna during your absence."

"Yes, though I don't believe they will rush things. They have the game apparently in their own hands. I may be back in a month. I shall bring Inez over—or take her to New York—as soon as I can get her out of Cuba."

"Of course. As for the rest of it, I had intended to go with you, if I found that my affairs were in shape to leave them again. It is quite possible that you will have plenty of excitement and adventure over there. But now this has turned out so, I will remain here, and keep an eye on De Villegas."

"Unfortunately, in these degenerate days a man cannot ride off with his chosen love. A few stout fellows from the Grange and the Abbey would soon straighten this out—say a hundred years ago. I do not believe they will attempt to force matters in a hurry. I will remain and keep tabs on them, and when you get back we will know what to do."

It was a poor scheme at best, but it was the only thing we could think of. I certainly must go to Cuba, and Rockstave could not elope with a girl he could not see.

We went that night to a hotel in Paris. We sat up till long after midnight, talking, and the burden of our conversation was Edna. Rockstave was a cool sort of lover.

I found myself picturing the Frenchman, Bergelot, in his place. What a storm of hotheaded words there would have been. But though Rockstave was calm, I knew that under his British bosom beat a heart of gold, and Edna could have won no better or truer love.

So thoroughly did the subject of Edna and De Villegas occupy our minds that neither of us spoke of the Russian hiding on board the *Nomad*. Even when I spoke of going to Havre and setting off for Cuba the following morning, I did not think of the Russian.

"There is no immediate haste for me to get to Havre," I said. "Wilkins is coaling. I shall reach there some time tomorrow, and if he is not ready, wait. That's all I can do. I would not tackle Cuba without full bunkers just now."

"No, indeed," said Rockstave. "You will need full bunkers, and perhaps full gunroom."

At last, having exhausted the subject so near to us, and having come no nearer a satisfactory conclusion, we went to bed.

In the morning Rockstave received a shock. We took up the papers that chanced to be handiest—I had a copy of the Paris edition of the *New York Herald*, and Rockstave had the *Temps*. Suddenly he uttered an ejaculation—so sharp—so unusually strained for him, that I looked up in surprise.

"What is it, Rockstave?" I asked. "You are as white as a ghost."

"Here is a notice that the Countess of Rockstave is dying," he said. "They are advertising for me. They must have known the yacht left the

Cape, and have been waiting for us to arrive. My mother has been in poor health for a long time. This, of course, takes me home at once."

"Yes—before all else," I said. "Go."

It never took Rockstave long to prepare for so short a journey as that. Inside of an hour he had had his breakfast, and was off to the station. I accompanied him, feeling in no hurry to reach the yacht, for I knew Wilkins would not be fully coaled. After I had bade Rockstave adieu and promised to communicate with him from Cuba, I fell to thinking about Edna again.

There was no telling how long Rockstave would be detained in England by his mother's illness, and perhaps death. If I went off to Cuba, it would leave Edna to the mercy of her persecutors. Yet, if I did not go it would perhaps be worse for Inez than for Edna, for Edna was at least within the protecting lines of civilization, while Inez was exposed to all sorts of danger.

If I could but see Edna once before I left, just to arrange some form of communication, I would feel better satisfied. But I knew there was no use going to my father's house then. He had undoubtedly given orders against admitting me. Edna would no doubt be confined to the house until it was certain that Rockstave and I were out of the way. The idea struck me that it might serve my purpose to go on to Havre, so that, in case my father, or Dona Estella had spies out after me they would know I was out of Paris, and then return stealthily to Paris and plan some method of communicating with Edna.

Full of this scheme, I took the train to Havre. Upon reaching the boat landing, I saw the graceful outlines of the Nomad where Wilkins had brought her up to be coaled. I was soon aboard, and there beheld a sight that filled me with amazement.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES.

THE heaviness of earth and air,
 The force of passing breeze,
 The weight of crowns and ships and worlds—
 I wonder not at these;
 I see the awful griefs and pains
 That faint souls undergo,
 And wonder how the human heart
 Can stand such weight of woe!
 The measurement of time and space,
 The depth of deepest seas,
 The distance of the faintest star—
 I marvel not at these;
 The measure that I marvel at
 All measurements above
 Is this: the wondrous height and depth
 And length and breadth of Love!

Clarence Urmy.

A QUEEN OF ATLANTIS.*

BY FRANK AUBREY.

A romance of the Caribbean Sea—Strange adventures among a people cut off from the rest of the world—Fantastic experiences in the land of the Flower Dwellers.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Vanina and Sydney Dareville and their young brother George, the uncared for children of a cruel stepfather, come together after tempestuous years and set sail for adventure on the brig Saucy Fan, which is owned by the stepfather and manned by a crew in league with him. The elder Dareville and Owen Wydale, a friend and fellow passenger, suspect some trickery that may bring Miss Dareville's fortune into the hands of her stepfather, but a fierce gale that keeps them below prevents them from watching the movements of the crew. At daybreak and on the clearing of the storm, they find the ship deserted by the crew and left imbedded in the weeds of the Sargasso Sea. With the aid of a spare sail Dareville and Wydale navigate the brig to a channel which leads them to the shores of a mysterious island. Penetrating inland on a scouting expedition, Wydale and George Dareville come suddenly upon Steve Foster, the former mate of the Saucy Fan, who holds them up at the mouth of a pistol.

CHAPTER VII.—MONELLA.

FOR some moments Foster and the other two gazed silently upon each other; the former was the first to speak.

"If yer comes any further I shoots," he stuttered. "Ah, yes"—when they halted—"I've got yer at last, 'ave I? Now I guess we can square accounts atween us.

"I don't know how you got 'ere from the place where we left the Saucy Fan—we thought she was safe enuff—but, howsomedever, it won't help you much, 'cos yer think yer've 'scaped, why, yer 'aven't, that's all. I've got a long score to settle wi' you two, an' I mean t' settle it now, today, when there's nobody to see or interfere."

Wydale could see the villain was like one drunk, partly with mingled fear and rage, no doubt, but partly, also probably, from strong drink. So unsteady was the hand that held the pistol, and so constantly did the man sway about, that Wydale would have closed with him and risked the consequence had he been alone.

But the fear that George might be injured by a stray shot in the scuffle held him back. Meantime the scoundrel gradually pulled himself together, and seemed somewhat to recover his self control.

"I don' know how you came 'ere," he repeated, "an' I don' care; but it's so much the worse for you—both of you. For I am goin' to kill yer both; now, straightaway, dead. I wanted to do it afore we left the brig, only

**This story began in the February issue of THE ARGOSY, which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.*

t'others wouldn't let me. Now I've got my chance I'm not agoin' t' let it slip, I tell yer.

"So say yer prayers, if yer've got any ter say, an' look sharp. I shall count twenty, an' then bang! and good by to the two of yer. With your own pistol, too—my, but that's a good un! Yer'll be killed with yer own pistol." For the wretch held in his hand Wydale's own stolen revolver.

While Owen quickly but despairingly turned over in his mind all kinds of plans, and narrowly watched his enemy, seeking an unguarded moment in which he might rush upon him with some hope of success, the other went on:

"Yer said I killed t' boy, which were a lie, 'cos he killed hisself; how-somedever, I mean t'pay yer out now by killin' t'other young varmint and yer-self, too. I dessay, besides, ye've 'ad some hand in killin' my mate over there. There's been some hanky panky business about it, and I s'pects you had a hand in it, so that's another good reason for my killin' on yer."

All that he said was interlarded with low, blasphemous oaths and vile slang, and Owen knew it was useless to answer him, or to attempt to bandy words with such a merciless wretch.

"Now, I'm goin' ter begin ter count," Foster went on. And he began "One, two, three," and so on up to twelve, when he suddenly stopped. "No," he grinned, struck by a new idea in the way of fiendish cruelty, "I won't kill yer; I shall just shoot yer in the legs, so's you can't get away."

"Then you'll lie 'ere alongside my pal till that flyin' beast comes back and makes a meal of yer. That's a bully thought. Now then, 'ere goes. Right leg first——"

But, just then, something came whizzing through the air, and the next moment his arm was hanging useless from the shoulder, with a large arrow through it. The revolver was dropped with a shriek of pain from his grasp, and fell to the ground, and his watchful antagonist rushed in and picked it up. Foster found himself now covered, in his turn, by the pistol.

But of this he seemed to take but little notice. His attention was too much taken up with his wounded arm and the pain it caused him. He sat down on a rock close by, and, amid a perfect volley of oaths and curses, made futile endeavors to withdraw the arrow, each effort calling forth a fresh howl of agony and renewed cursings.

Seeing that he was, for the time at least, reduced to harmlessness, Wydale looked round to learn where the friendly arrow had come from, but the gathering dusk had already begun to render the rocks around him indistinct.

His glance was, however, quickly guided by hearing a rattling and jangling, as of steel accoutrements, and, looking in the direction whence it came, he saw, advancing towards him, a strange figure indeed.

A man of gigantic stature had come down a side path from a rock above. From head to foot he was clad in shining armor, and upon his helmet was a plume of white feathers. In one hand he carried an enormous bow, in the other a long spear of unusual size and weight; and slung over one shoulder was a quiver filled with arrows.

By his side was a great sword of a size proportionate to the other weapons, and to the wearer's powerful frame. He moved towards them with a long,

easy stride, and behind him came three others of ordinary stature, clad also in suits of armor even more strange in appearance.

These had no bows or quivers, but carried spears, swords, and shields. Beside them marched one who seemed to be shield bearer to the first one; he carried also—not without some apparent difficulty—another heavy spear, probably a spare one for his chief. The shield bearer and some of the others had also lighted lanterns.

The newcomers marched onwards with military precision till within eight or nine yards, when they halted, and their leader addressed the astonished Wydale in English.

"I am glad to think, sir," said the stranger, in a full, sonorous voice, and with an air of dignity, "that I have been of some assistance to you, and saved you from the tender mercies of this miscreant, who proclaimed, as I overheard from yonder rock, his intention to shoot you with your own pistol."

This was spoken in clear, unmistakable English; the accent was perfect, so that no one could have doubted that the speaker was an Englishman. Yet there was a certain old world air, a stateliness and gravity both of tone and manner about him, and with it a bearing so majestic, that Wydale felt at once he was in the presence of no ordinary man. And, in his surprise, he scarce could find words in which to make reply.

Certainly, he had cause for wonderment. Here was an apparition, a figure of a knight of the olden times, with sword and bow and spear, with waving plume and chivalrous mien—a figure, too, of such stature as is rarely seen nowadays—attended by retainers as strangely attired as himself, yet addressing him, in casual fashion, in plain, every day English.

It is scarcely matter for surprise that Owen felt thoroughly bewildered. He hesitated and stammered, and seeing this the other went on:

"It is growing dark, and it is not good to be abroad in this part in the darkness. If you will trust yourselves to my guidance, I will see you conducted to a safer place."

Wydale roused himself at last to speak.

"Sir," he now returned, slowly and almost unconsciously imitating the other's gravity and old world speech, and with instinctive respect, "if it was you who sent that arrow to its mark, we have, indeed, reason to be grateful, and your offer places us under a still further obligation.

"Since you have so clearly proved your friendliness to us, I shall have no hesitation in accepting your advice and proffered help. We know nothing of the country here, having only drifted in by chance on an abandoned vessel."

The stranger nodded curtly, as if he quite understood or already knew the position of Wydale and his companion. Then he strode over to the wounded man, who had ceased his cursings and lamentation to listen and stare in astonishment as great as Owen had shown.

"You do not deserve mercy, for you would have shown none," the stranger thus addressed him sternly; "but I shall let you go this time; beware, however, how you conduct yourself in future. Let me see to your wound."

He handed his weapons to the shield bearer, and, stepping up to the mate, examined his arm and deftly withdrew the arrow; not, however, without

causing the sufferer to give vent to a howl of pain. Calling to his attendant in a language unknown to the others, he was handed a handkerchief or scarf, with which he bound up the arm in a manner that showed him to be well skilled in surgery.

"We may as well see what other stolen property the scoundrel has on him before we let him go," the stranger observed to Wydale.

He turned to his men and spoke to them as before, in a strange language; whereupon they went up to the man, and, despite his protests, made a careful search of him, the shield bearer holding up a lantern to assist them. Then they went to the dead body and searched that also. What they found they handed to their chief, who passed then on to Wydale.

"This cartridge belt is mine," said Wydale, "and the other revolver and cartridge belt taken from the dead man belong to my friend. So also do this watch and chain." The last mentioned articles had been found on Foster.

"Then take them," said the stranger briefly. And, turning to the mate, resumed, "Look you, sirrah! Take my advice and get back into that hole you were hiding in just now; you will be safe there for the night.

"In the morning you can go where you please; but remember, if you offend again, and you fall into my hands, I shall not let you off so easily. And now, friends," he added, turning to Wydale and his companion, "let us be going.

"My people like not to trust themselves abroad here in the dark—nor would you if you knew their reasons. They will give you the benefit of the lights; for myself I know my way blindfolded."

He spoke with a grave yet easy courtesy; it was the courtly grace of a king wishing to put his guests thoroughly at their ease, yet, in doing so, to call forth in them a feeling of homage and respect.

When he had finished speaking, he inclined his head and made way for them, and the two, returning the bow, followed the men with the lanterns.

They ascended a steep, winding path, and soon arrived at a broad ledge of rock that overlooked the scene of their encounter with the mate. Peering down, Owen thought he could dimly discern the man leaning against a rock and looking after them.

And he could not help a passing feeling of pity for the wretch left thus, alone and wounded, in a strange place, exposed to unknown dangers; and near at hand the dead body of the other upon whom had fallen some awful fate, the exact nature of which they did not even then understand.

Following his guides, he now saw before him, in the face of the perpendicular rock, a sort of gateway, within which could be seen the forms of men moving about with lights. These illuminated the opening with a glow that, mingled with a clanging and clashing of arms and armor, made the place appear a cheerful refuge from the darkness and loneliness of the silent plain below, with its deserted ruins and its hinted terrors.

When they entered, men, all in armor, as were their guides, formed in two lines and saluted with respect; and immediately they were well inside, a great barred gate behind them clanged to with a bang and an obvious haste that somewhat surprised Wydale, and made him start.

The tall stranger looked round with the semblance of a smile.

"They like not to have these gates open at night," he said. "Indeed, it had fared ill with you if I had not been here; for though they heard and saw all, and would have been glad to help you, yet none would have ventured forth, either alone or in a crowd."

Wydale would fain have put many inquiries that rose in his mind, but there was that in the manner of their newly found friend that seemed to forbid questioning him. He spoke only that which pleased him; such was the feeling he inspired.

So Owen held his peace, and patiently waited the other's pleasure.

They all now passed through other gates that closed behind them as had the first, and entered a spacious entrance hall, well lighted with hanging lamps, where were still more men. As these drew up in ranks, their chief took Wydale aside and questioned him.

"Where is your vessel?" he inquired.

Owen described the position as well as he was able, the other listening with preoccupied air, as though scarcely hearing. But at the end he nodded his head, and said:

"Yes, yes; in the bay, at the western point of the island. What size is she?"

"A brig, and her tonnage——"

"Aye, aye," the other interrupted, nodding again. "And you were the only ones left on board—you four—the others all deserted you?"

Wydale almost started. He did not remember to have told him how many had been left on board the vessel. However, he answered quietly:

"That is correct."

"I assume," his questioner went on, "from your venturing thus far unarmed into a strange country, that you had no arms. The runaways stole all there were available?"

"Yes."

"You had not even a pistol to bring with you on an exploration that might be full of danger?"

"None, sir, else you may be sure I should have brought it."

"Yes. And amongst the cargo, had you none there you could have got at before venturing abroad?"

This query seemed to be put, Owen thought, with a shade of anxiety in the tone. But he could only shake his head.

"I saw all the cargo stowed," he declared, "and it belongs to my friend who is with me, to myself, and another, jointly. We unfortunately know only too well that there are no arms of any kind on board."

"Ah! well, now I will show you a nearer way back to your vessel."

And with that he turned and motioned to those who had first been with him to accompany him. They caught up lanterns that were standing at hand and went on in front, their chief walking behind with Owen and his companion.

Thus they passed out of the great entrance chamber, leaving behind them the armed men assembled there, and struck into a gallery that led off to the right. Here and there they came to other similar galleries, all of good height

and width, and all brightly lighted with hanging lamps. They seemed to be well ventilated, too, and dry, for there was no trace of stagnant air or of damp.

After a long walk they suddenly emerged, through gates by which were other armed men on duty, into the open air, upon a hanging road or terrace that overlooked the sea. Here they caught sight of numbers of lights below, and heard a distant hum as of a populous city not far away.

But their guides waited not, and they were given no time to gain more than a passing glimpse here and there. Presently they turned again into an underground gallery in every way resembling those they had already traversed, and here they proceeded for a long distance, always in the same silence.

At last they came to a massive door, which was closed and barred and locked. And this, on being opened, gave entrance to an unlighted chamber, at the end of which was another door, which took some time to open.

When, however, it swung back and they stepped outside, both the boy and Wydale uttered an exclamation of surprise; they could see at once that they stood on a ledge of rock overlooking the bay where lay the Saucy Fan.

By the aid of the lanterns they made their way down a rough path till they arrived in the center of a dense mass of bushes, and here their conductor stopped.

"Take this lantern," said he. "With its aid you will see the way out. It will bring you to the shore, and the light will help you to find your way to your vessel. Tomorrow I will see you further. Good night, and God speed."

"Good night, sir, and may heaven repay you for what you did for us today," Wydale answered gratefully.

"And, please, sir, may I thank you, too?" cried George impulsively; "and if you come to see us, we will all thank you, and my sister most of all, I know."

"Ah!" said the stranger, looking at the boy with kindly eyes, but in a half dreamy fashion. "You have a sister here? Is her name Vanina?"

At this most unexpected and astonishing query both his hearers started in surprise. But he appeared not to notice it and turned, and, with a wave of the hand, seemed to dismiss them.

"May I ask a question?" Wydale begged of him. He had had much ado to make up his mind to the request, so curiously had the manner of the other awed and impressed him.

However, the stranger halted, and awaited the query.

"I only wish to ask," said Wydale, feeling very much confused—he knew not why—"whether you can tell me the name of the island—and—if you see no objection—your own name?"

"I am called Monella," was the answer, given in simple fashion and a quiet tone, "and this is the island of Atlantis. Good night."

And so saying, the speaker turned and left them.

CHAPTER VIII.—A GAME OF BLUFF.

FOR the first morning in what appeared a cruelly anxious time, the four on board the Saucy Fan rose and sat down to their early meal in something

like good spirits. It is not too much to say that they were, in a sense, quite different people—such creatures are we of the circumstances of the hour.

The account brought back by Wydale and George of their adventures had changed all their thoughts, and fears, and hopes, and expectations, and directed their ideas into new and most unexpected channels. It was now clear that the island was inhabited, and by what appeared to be a friendly and a white race, one of whom at least—and he evidently a man of mark—spoke English.

From him and his followers it was clear they might look for honest treatment, and probably, if need were, for protection; for had he not already aided them in a most critical emergency? Moreover, though armed himself with only bows and arrows, he had scrupulously handed over to Wydale the revolver found upon the dead man, although he must have known its value.

This went to show that they stood in no danger of having the ship plundered by the inhabitants. Their minds thus set at ease, they could now give them to the pleasurable excitement of anticipation, and speculation as to the strange experiences that awaited them in their intercourse with this unknown, old world people.

All sorts of incidents were conceivable in circumstances so unusual. Vanina and her brother indulged in almost every kind of speculation; the latter especially was full of irrepressible excitement. Wydale was, in fact, the only one of the four who did not altogether share in the elation of the others.

The memory of the dead man's face, of the unaccountable horror—even terror—that had seized upon him the previous day, and his vague recollection of the terrible shape he had seen rise into the air from its horrible repast, and fly away with the departing mist—the memory of all this had by no means left him. Indeed, it had haunted him throughout the night, and thrust itself into the foreground, even to the partial exclusion of what had happened since.

He could not prevent his thoughts from dwelling on it, nor help speculating upon the mystery of the deserted city. That the gruesome tragedy he had witnessed and the unknown horror had something to do with it he felt convinced. If so, the terror it inspired must indeed be great to cause a whole people to forsake their ancient city, and their gardens, and their pastures.

Then the crew of the brig. They might yet give trouble, for they would be desperate, and they were armed with guns. Against those the two revolvers and the few cartridges he had recovered could do but little.

But, if he allowed his thoughts to dwell upon these doubtful points, he did so only as the prudent soldier calmly weighs and calculates the odds against him, but without permitting them to daunt him. Indeed, the spice of danger and adventure he foresaw was in itself a strong attraction, and how great that danger could be he already knew.

After the breakfast they discussed the program for the day. Vanina wished to go ashore. She longed, she said, for a walk on the sands and under the trees, and was tired of being stived up on the vessel. But Wydale was opposed to it.

"You forget that those scoundrels who deserted this vessel and left us to die—murderers they are, in intention, every one, skipper, mate, and all—

are lurking in the neighborhood. They have firearms—your own rifle, Dareville, among others—and are a desperate, utterly unscrupulous gang. One of them, at least—Foster—knows we are here, and will tell the others.

"Then think what a temptation the vessel and her cargo will hold out to them. Why, they would murder us all merely to get at the whisky to get drunk on. My advice is to stick to the ship today until our friend of last night comes to visit us, as he promised. Then I hope things may assume a different complexion."

This advice was so well judged that Sydney at once accepted it.

"Wydale is right," he said; "you had better defer your visit to the shore, Vanina. Confound those rascals; for the moment I had forgotten they were about."

"It's altogether an uncanny place, apparently," observed Vanina, with a little shudder, and in a disappointed tone. "Strange monsters about, both in the sea and on the shore. And, as though that were not enough, you must needs threaten us again with that hateful gang I thought we were well rid of. I declare, you've chased away all the glowing expectations I had formed, and brought us back to the period of 'excursions and alarms!'"

Wydale, to—or rather at—whom this speech was more particularly directed, laughed good naturedly.

"I am sorry to seem to pose as a wet blanket," he assured her. "It's all for your good, you know, as mothers say to children; and it is, I hope, only for one day."

"After today, I trust there will be no further cause to place any restraint upon your liberty. Your word shall be our law, even as though you were captain of the brig."

"Or Queen Boadicea," George put in slyly.

"Nay, some one more up to date, I hope," said she, the smile returning to her face.

"Well—say—ah! What do you say to Queen of Atlantis? Shall we dub you, Vanina, Queen of Atlantis?" George suggested.

And at this conceit he clapped his hands, and boisterously expressed approval; then, lifting his sister's hand, he bowed over it and raised it to his lips.

"Thus does thy brother salute his sister and his queen," he said, with mock solemnity.

For answer he received a box on the ears, and an admonition to be more respectful to his sister. Then he ran off to fish over the vessel's side. His sister followed him and sat down to read a favorite book.

Wydale and Dareville sat a little apart, cleaning and examining their revolvers, and counting up their cartridges. Of these there were, unfortunately, very few, and Sydney regarded them distressfully.

"We'll have to save these up," he remarked ruefully, "for emergencies. Each cartridge here may prove worth its weight in gold."

"More," commented Wydale tersely. "Each may save a life."

"Yes. And for that reason, even if the skipper and his following should come down on us, we must try to bluff 'em, somehow. A shot or two well aimed and timed may do a lot amongst a cowardly set like that."

"I have been thinking," resumed Wydale, "whether it is prudent to keep the vessel so near the shore. Wouldn't it be wiser to get her further out?"

"I don't see that it can make much difference. They're pretty sure to come in the boats. However, a soldier should never neglect a chance, and they might come by land over the ridge and pop at us from behind those trees. So, suppose we slip the shore line and let her drift free. With this bit of breeze she'll swing out away from the shore."

This was soon done, the raft was hauled on board, and the brig slowly drifted farther out.

This had the effect of disarranging George's fishing lines, and he complained loudly when he pulled them up and found them in an inextricable tangle. But suddenly he ceased his lamentations and stared at something in the distance.

"I say, what's that?"

Sydney took up a pair of glasses and looked. Then he put them quietly down.

"It's a boat," he said. "You two must go below. We are likely to have trouble."

Vanina stoutly protested, but was forced to yield, and retired with her brother to the cabin.

In consequence of the change in her position, the brig was now lying end on to the advancing boat.

"That may enable us to bring our cannon into play, if need be," Sydney observed. "Now, don't let them come too near; and, if we have to shoot in earnest, I'll take the skipper and you the mate."

Wydale nodded and no more was said. The two lounged over the bows and watched the boat—there was only one—through their glasses, waiting quietly till it should be near enough to hail. They could already make out the skipper, but Foster was not to be seen.

"That's near enough," said Dareville presently. "Now a hail and a command to stop, and fire a shot across her bows if she still comes on. Next shot I aim at the skipper. That's the program, I take it."

Those in the boat took no notice of the hail; but when a bullet came splashing through the water alongside, sending quite a little shower of spray on board, they stopped at once, apparently in great surprise.

"Perhaps," suggested Wydale, "the mate hasn't yet got back, and their appearance here is accidental. If so, they don't know where these pistols came from, or what arms and ammunition we may have. You see Foster's not there."

"I fancy you're right. If so, we'll bluff 'em if we play our cards with judgment."

Then Durford, the skipper, stood up and shouted something that they failed to catch. However, its purport must have been deemed satisfactory by the speaker, for he sat down, and the boat, which had drifted round broadside on, began to move again.

"One for the gunwale this time, as a warning," Sydney muttered. "The next for his skipper's ship in right earnest." And he fired.

The skipper, who had one hand on the gunwale and the other on the tiller, pulled the former hastily away, as a bullet crashed into the wood just alongside of it. They stopped rowing again, and seemed to be consulting.

"If we only had a good supply of cartridges I would hurry up the rascals," Sydney grunted discontentedly. "But we can't afford to throw a single shot away."

Durford again stood up. He made signs to those on the brig, pointed to the shore, and pulled out a white handkerchief. Then the boat was rowed towards the shore and grounded on the sand. Durford landed and walked alone along the shore to the nearest point that faced the brig, all the time busily waving the white handkerchief as a flag of truce.

"I've a good mind to kill him as he stands, flag of truce or no flag of truce," Sydney muttered through his teeth. "The murdering hound! It makes my blood boil to see him impudently standing there trusting to *our* honor, after the way he's treated us. However, as he's come for a parley, I suppose we must let him have his way."

"Brig ahoy!" now came from the skipper.

"On shore there, ahoy!" shouted back Dareville. "Who are you?"

This very unexpected question seemed to disconcert the flag of truce man, for he hesitated, and looked at the brig uneasily. After a pause, he began again; and the following colloquy ensued:

"Brig ahoy! Is that Mr. Dareville?"

"Shore ahoy! It is. Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Oh, come, sir; you know me well enough. I am Joseph Durford, captain of the Saucy Fan."

"I know no Joseph Durford, captain of the Saucy Fan. I know a Joseph Durford, pirate, who abandoned his watertight vessel in a calm; I know Joseph Durford, the rascally thief who stole our gold watches and rifles and revolvers, and I know Joseph Durford the would be murderer of ladies and boys, who drugged our coffee and battened down the hatches, and left us to die in the Sargasso Sea; and whom I will lay by the heels and send to penal servitude, if I can catch him!"

Dareville said all this quite calmly, without the least show of temper. But it stung the other into a fury.

"It's all a lie!" he shouted, with an awful oath. "I never stole yer—watches; I've got a chronometer of my own, better'n both yours put together. If others stole 'em, I didn't. And, as to the rest, you was forgotten in the hurry—I thought you was in the other boat. One of 'em's lost."

"That will do. You may save your soul the sin of any further lies. So that's the fancy tale you had concocted, is it? Well, be off! You've no business here! If you or any of you attempt to come on board, we will shoot you down like the dogs you are."

"As to shootin', two can play at that game," retorted Durford, darting glances of hate from under his scowling brows. "An' when the odds is about five to one, the largest number generally gets the best of it in the end."

"Anyhow, I am skipper of the Saucy Fan, and I am agoin' to take command of her. And, Mr. Dareville, you've alluded to a lady on board, your sister.

I advise yer, for yer own sake and hers, not to get my men's blood up; yer don't know what men may do in the heat of——"

"Be off, you hound! I've had enough of this!" Dareville interrupted. "I have taken possession of the Saucy Fan in the name of the owners with whom I am a partner. Even on your own showing, you abandoned the brig—and we've salved her.

"I've appointed myself skipper; and you've no further business here. Your very presence is an insult. Sheer off! or I will put a bullet through you!"

"Then it's war to the knife, is it? You will regret this when it's too late, Mr. Dareville."

"We're not afraid of you," Dareville returned contemptuously. "Now, see here! When you appeared in your, or I should say *my* boat—for it has been stolen from the brig—you interrupted a little pistol practice I was enjoying.

"I want to go on with it; but you've got your foot on the pebble I was taking for a target. Would you mind moving your foot—thanks!" and a bullet from his revolver struck the very pebble Durford had been standing on, just when he raised his foot.

Evidently the feat impressed him. But he moved away slowly, shaking his fist.

Dareville laughed. "I was sorry to waste the bullet," he said to Wydale; "but I am in hopes the hint may not be lost on him; and it may save some lives."

"A good hint, too. I can see that you can shoot. Ah! What a pity to be here without more ammunition."

"Yes; and the question now is, what arms and ammunition have *they* got," responded Sydney, watching the boat somewhat anxiously through his glasses. "If it comes to a long fight, they'll soon wear out our slender stock."

Durford had regained the boat, in a towering rage, for he was gesticulating violently. The craft was pushed off, and once more headed for the brig.

"He seems to mean business this time." Dareville set his teeth while he was speaking. "Mind! Leave Durford to me! I'll give him what he deserves. But look out that they don't pot you."

The boat came on, but in a desultory fashion, as could be seen. Men would pull, and then stop to look round apprehensively, when a loud oath and threat from the skipper—audible even to those on the brig—would start them rowing again.

Suddenly they stopped rowing altogether, and looked and pointed eagerly at something on the other side of the vessel. Some even stood up to look over the others, regardless of how they exposed themselves to the pistols of their antagonists.

"What are they looking at?" Sydney asked, suspicious of some ruse. "Look round and see. I'm not going to take my eye off that villain."

Wydale looked, and uttered an exclamation.

"It's a boat—several boats—a whole fleet of boats coming round the point!" he cried. "It must be our friend of last night."

It was as he said, a whole fleet of boats; and now that those on board of them had caught sight of the brig, they raised a hearty shout and blew loud blasts on horns and trumpets.

In his turn Wydale could not help shouting, "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

This brought George and his sister up on deck. At sight of the flotilla they joined in the cheer. It was heard on the strangers' boats, and immediately responded to by another outburst; while George actually danced round the deck in his excitement.

As for Durford and his crew, they evidently mistrusted the strange craft, for they turned their boat round and rowed away.

CHAPTER IX.—"QUEEN OF ATLANTIS!"

THE four on the deck of the Saucy Fan watched with ever increasing wonder the advancing fleet, as more and more vessels kept appearing round the point, and those on board of them added their cheers and trumpet blasts to the general clamor. And now that the first were nearer, and could be more clearly viewed, the spectators were altogether amazed at the richness of their mountings and the gorgeousness of the whole display.

Every vessel had sails, as well as banks of rowers. But the sails seemed intended rather for ornament than for use. They were of some material that glistened like silver, and on them were worked strange devices in brilliant colors. All were square sails, hung much as lug sails would be, and altogether appeared to partake of the character of banners.

Certainly the vessels depended more for their means of propulsion upon their banks of rowers than upon these gorgeous sails; for they moved with the precision of machines, and appeared to be as completely under control as the engines of a steam launch.

The foremost vessel passed the brig for some distance, and then swept round towards the shore in a curve; behind them came five larger vessels—great royal barges one might guess them—with one still larger and more superbly decorated in the center.

This vessel was the most richly fitted up and ornamented of all the imposing array. Its sides seemed to be of ivory, with a band of delicate turquoise blue running from stem to stern. In and out ran designs in gold and silver.

The oars that appeared at the sides below the deck were gold mounted, and the blades appeared to be of polished silver and flashed in the sun each time they left the water. The bow was shaped like the head, neck, and forepart of the body of a stork or crane, with open mouth and outspread wings, the neck and head shooting high into the air.

A silver spangled awning was swung above the deck, and upon the two masts that, like the oars, seemed to be worked in gold, hung banners or sails of wondrous workmanship, the silver sheen of the general groundwork dazzling the eyes as it caught and mirrored back the sunshine.

On the decks of the smaller craft were rows of men clad in polished armor, and armed with flashing spears and shields. And on the raised decks at stem and stern of the larger ones were officers in the most brilliant and varied suits

of armor that perhaps have ever been seen ; so, at least, thought those on the Saucy Fan, looking through their glasses at the different vessels, as each in turn came clearly into view.

When the five central vessels had arrived opposite the brig, the whole line stopped, and those behind them swept round towards the shore. Thus the Saucy Fan was in the center of a glittering half circle of the strange craft, all of them beautiful vessels as to design and decoration, yet very small compared with the brig.

Then all remained motionless, while every one on board sent up a deafening shout, the soldiers and their leaders lifting their swords and shields and other weapons, again and again in the air, saluting.

"What on the earth is it all about?" said at last the puzzled Sydney. "What a pity we didn't know they were coming. We'd have had the Union Jack flying, and we could have dipped it in proper style, you know."

"Couldn't we fire off the cannon?" suggested George. "There's only powder in it."

"A good idea, Georgy," Wydale answered, "but powder here is too precious to waste. No, all we can do, I'm afraid, is to shout back our loudest."

"If we could only get at some of the fireworks that are down in the hold, and let them off," sighed George. "That would fetch 'em."

And now from the principal barge a boat was seen putting off. In it were, besides the rowers, figures all clad in armor. One, a giant in stature, wore a coat of mail, with a white tunic underneath. George pointed him out to Sydney and his sister.

"That," he said, "is the one we saw last night ; the one who called himself Monella."

Seeing their intention of coming on board, Wydale and Dareville hastened to the gangway, and replaced the ladder which they had hoisted in, in anticipation of the attack from the crew.

The ladder having been lowered, the commanding figure of Monella came over the side, followed by four others. A minute later the five newcomers stood in a semicircle around the deck facing the other four.

A short pause ensued while the one group gazed upon the other, surprise and interest roused on both sides. And seldom, perhaps, in the history of the world—outside the realms of pantomime and comic opera—had there been seen a more extraordinary contrast.

The principal figure, towering head and shoulders above the others, was clad in a suit of mail—chain armor, all of gold. Beneath was a white satin tunic, also embroidered with gold, precious stones being sewn or otherwise fastened in such manner as to imitate the forms of birds. A white cloak with a scarlet lining hung from his shoulders, and round his left arm was a jeweled band as of some order or decoration, the center being a diamond of extraordinary size and brilliancy.

Upon his head was a helmet of gold, inlaid with silver, and by his side was a sword such as some could scarce have wielded even with both hands. So much for his dress. His face and figure were still more striking. Though his hair and full beard were iron gray, he showed no other signs of age. His

figure was well formed, supple, and muscular, as that of a well built man of thirty, and the perfect mold of the features intimated that as a youth he must have been handsome and well favored, far above the average of mankind.

The face was still supremely handsome, and one that attracted and retained the notice of all who looked upon it. But its greatest charm lay in its changing expressions and the penetrating glance of the steady gray eyes. These seemed to be gifted with the faculty of charming or overawing those upon whom they fell, according as they softened in tenderness, sympathy, or affection, or flashed in anger or contempt.

But, whether they looked forth in stern rebuke, or in pitying interest, or lighted up with the fire of unflinching courage and high resolve, there was ever a touch of human sympathy that aroused and held the respect, trustfulness, and devotion of all around him. To these attributes—only seen now and then in the world, and never save in those born to rule their fellow men—were added a graceful ease and nobility, even majesty of bearing, that of itself commanded homage.

Of those with him, three were in armor richly chased or demascened; while the fourth was habited in a coat of mail similar to Monella's, set off with an embroidered sash. All carried swords and daggers with jeweled hilts; but the last one's arms were of lighter make than the others.

Opposed to these were the four in homely English garb of travel, certainly presenting as odd a contrast as can be well imagined.

Wydale advanced and warmly greeted the friend who had so opportunely come to his aid the previous evening, and Monella, in turn, spoke a few words of welcome to him and his friends, assuring them that the display of armed men in the vessels around was to be taken in a complimentary and not a hostile sense.

A few minutes later, when he had become known to Vanina and Sydney Dareville, and had, in return, indicated the names of those with him, he, to Wydale's surprise, asked for a few words in private with "the maiden"—as in his old world speech he designated Vanina—and her brother. As a consequence the three disappeared into the cabin, leaving Wydale and the lad on deck, confronted by the four strangers.

Of these, the one who wore the suit of mail now advanced and offered his hand. He was a man of perhaps forty five years of age, with a clean shaven face, good natured in expression, and a figure that was inclined to stoutness.

"My name is Dr. Manleth," he began. "I am an Englishman, and am glad to welcome you and your friends on my own account."

And he shook hands with George.

"You look puzzled," he went on, with a smile, "and I don't wonder. I have been here five years, so am used to the place. But, when we first landed here—Monella and myself—it was more astonishing than I can well convey to you; especially as we, of course, did not then know the language; and it took a long time to understand it all."

"And how did you get here?" Owen asked.

"Shipwrecked; drifted here in an open boat; two others who were in the boat with us died of exposure and hunger and thirst. We were both nearly

dead, too, when we got here. But they treated us well—handsomely, in fact—and Monella soon became their recognized leader—sort of prime minister, commander in chief, and archbishop, all in one. He is a wonderful man.”

“But why all these soldiers? Whom is there to fight against? One would think you were at war with all the——”

“So we are; and very much at war, too, unfortunately. It had gone badly with us lately. But we managed as well as we could, and waited patiently, hoping that you were coming.”

“That *we* were coming!” Wydale repeated, feeling bewildered. “How in the world could you guess we were coming? And what help can *we* be to you? We have no firearms, I am sorry to say.”

“So I hear; and, of course, we are sorry, too; and disappointed. But Monella seems in good heart about it, and that is everything, though I do not know what is in his mind. They trust to him blindly, like a lot of children, sheep I had almost said. They are kindly, docile, well disposed people, but haven’t spirit.”

“He’s tried his best to infuse some of his own lion courage into them, but they have hitherto remained listless and wanting in enthusiasm; while against us we have a horde of ruthless foes who are perfect devils for fighting and cruelty of all kinds. Hence, you see, Monella has been sadly handicapped, and any other man would have despaired. But that is a word unknown to him, I fancy. However, I hope we shall get on better now you have come. So we have all been hoping.”

“*We?*” Wydale again asked in wonder. “What have *we* to do with it?”

“Hush! Here they come. Now we shall soon know whether the prophecies are to be fulfilled.”

Vanina came first out of the cabin, followed by Dareville and Monella. She looked flushed, and her eyes were unusually bright.

Her whole manner and bearing, too, had changed—so Wydale thought, feeling each moment more surprised at her glowing face and sparkling eyes. Then he glanced at Dareville, and read there, too, signs that surprised and puzzled him. But no time was given him for speculation.

Monella stepped up beside Vanina and addressed her.

“Let me now present to you, more formally, these gentlemen, some of the chief officers of state. This is the Lord Kandlar, High Chamberlain; this is the Lord Ombrian, the Admiral; this is the Lord Selion, State Treasurer; and last, but not least, here is my good friend, Dr. Manleth, a scientist of no mean attainments, and a good and worthy English gentleman. If I do not name him among our lords, it is from his own choice. He could be so ranked if he chose, but has declined; he holds that a scientist should not seek worldly honors.”

“Also,” good humoredly said Manleth, “a doctor cannot well be much of a fighting man. There must be some one to attend the wounded—and there have been many lately, you must know.”

“Ah, yes,” confirmed Monella. “And well it is for them that they have one like our friend here to look after them. And now, will you come on board our state barge?”

"What are you going to do with this vessel?" Vanina asked.

"We shall tow her with us to our harbor and docks."

"Then," said Vanina, looking round, as Wydale, who was watching her, thought, with a sort of triumph, "let me stay on board and go with her. I will not desert the Saucy Fan for another vessel to make my entry among your people—no! not though that other vessel were the richest and the grandest in the world."

"Be it so," replied Monella, inclining his head, as in approval. "I will now give the necessary orders."

He went over the side and spoke in a strange language to those remaining in the boat in which they had come. These rowed at once to the brilliant barge and communicated their message to those on board, then hastened round to other vessels in turn. Then there was again much shouting and blowing of trumpets, and anon the barge moved round, and three of the larger vessels with rowers came near to take the brig in tow.

The boat then came back, bringing six or eight native sailors—even these, Wydale noticed, were partly dressed in light armor, and under Monella's direction they manned the capstan and weighed anchor. Soon the Saucy Fan was once more on her way, moving majestically through the water in tow of a string of the native war vessels, among which she towered like a man of war among merchant craft.

The state barge came on behind her, and the remainder of the fleet fell into line, three abreast, some in front and some in the rear.

And, while they thus proceeded across the bay, from time to time mighty shouts went up from one end of the line of vessels to the other. And to Owen it seemed as though he could distinguish the word "Vanina."

"What is it they are saying?" he presently asked the doctor, who was standing beside him.

"They are shouting," the other made answer, "Hail, Vanina! Queen of Atlantis!"

CHAPTER X.—A LAND OF STRANGE ROMANCE.

BEFORE Wydale could frame a reply or a further query in response to the astonishing statement of the doctor, the latter had moved away to speak to some one else. Thus left to himself, Wydale leaned over the taffrail, and gazed out on the scene before him with the air of a man too utterly bewildered to be quite sure whether what he sees is real, or only part of a fantastic dream.

So, at least, he felt himself; and he had met with so many surprises in the last forty eight hours that he was now prepared for almost any unparalleled developments. Everything about him began to wear an air of unreality. Even his friends were changed; the very expressions of their faces were changed—so Owen thought—as they stood and talked with Monella and others around them.

Slowly the long array passed out of the bay and began to round the point at the south west end, and then there gradually unfolded itself before them another scene as unexpected as it was striking.

The coast line ran off to the left—a long wall of high, precipitous, glistening rock, with three hanging terraces, constructed one above the other on the face of the cliff. At intervals in these were small towers, and the roadways were screened off by battlements and loop holed walls. Opposite to this coast line, that is to say, to the right, and about half a mile away, another island rose out of this silent sea, looking, as it gleamed and sparkled in the sunlight through a slight haze, rather like a fairy creation than solid fact.

This second island rose steeply from the water, and upon it stood a mighty castle built of the crystal rock. In size, in height, it was colossal, and in design it displayed a massive grandeur that exceeded in effect anything Wydale had ever before beheld. Beyond it could be seen an extensive city, rising tier above tier in the background, with towers and minarets so lofty that they seemed to melt into the air above.

While Wydale was gazing in admiration upon this scene, the doctor returned to his side.

"That," he said, "is Dilandis, or 'New Atlantis,' though itself, I imagine, pretty old; and the island on which it is built is called Dilanda. The ancient city is situated in the other island, on the further side of those cliffs to the left."

Wydale nodded.

"Aye," he said, "I have seen the ruins. But tell me, why is it deserted? And why do you all go about thus in armor?"

"Your first question requires rather a lengthy answer," replied Manleth, "and I must leave it for another occasion, or for some one else, for, indeed, I am not quite sure that I rightly understand it yet myself. But, as to the second query, the matter is unfortunately all too simple. We are liable at any moment to attacks from our enemies.

"I say 'we,' because both Monella and myself have for some years thoroughly identified ourselves with the people here, who have been good friends to us. Their foes, the 'Karanites,' as they are called—from the name of their King, 'Kara'—are adepts with the bow and arrow, the sword, and the spear; hence you see that, in the absence of firearms, armor becomes a matter of necessity.

"All the armor which you see here is of very ancient make; they have quantities stored away. It remained unused, yet carefully preserved, for centuries; for this warfare is a comparatively recent trouble."

"I see. It all seems very strange—a little world in which one has to go back to antiquated modes of warfare. It seems like a dream, an impossibility in the nineteenth century."

"Ah, yes; it appeared so to us when we first came here. But we have grown accustomed to it, as you will after a time. I expect they will want you to join their ranks; and they will fit you out in a suit like all the rest. We had hoped you would have had some firearms with you in your vessel; that would have very quickly brought the war to an end. But we must now still struggle on as best we can without."

"That reminds me," observed Wydale, "you said that you expected us, and spoke of prophecies and other enigmatical outpourings. What does it all mean?"

Dr. Manleth gave a gesture of impatience.

"I'm sure I can't explain. I do not understand myself," he said. "We live here in a half real world, the rest is myth and superstition. Everything is more or less enshrouded in mystery, and though I have been here some years, there is much I cannot fathom. For instance, they insist that they were driven out of the old city by a race of vampires."

"A race of vampires! What does that mean?"

"They say that in the interior of the main island there are terrible uncouth flying monsters. They call them 'Kralins,' which, in their language, signifies vampires, and declare that they not only attack and devour human beings, but have the power of fascinating them—holding them, as by a spell, before their own approach, thus preventing the victims from escaping. As a scientist one of course deems such a tale a myth."

"Have you encountered them?" Wydale asked.

"No. Our rulers won't let one venture there. But I have managed to slip through the guards once or twice, and have wandered about in the ruined city and its vicinity without seeing anything worse than my own shadow."

"But I have seen something more—only yesterday. I have seen—dimly through the mist—a monstrous flying creature which I can't describe, and I have seen its victim," and here he shuddered, "and I was almost stifled with an odor so supremely loathsome as to confuse your senses, and make you sick and dizzy and unable to move, and to fill you with a deadly horror. I have such a vivid recollection of it that it will always remain in my memory."

"You—you declare this to be true?"

"I do; solemnly. Upon my honor."

The doctor paused and ruminated for a while, then said:

"It is very strange; but this is a marvelous land, in which one scarce knows how much to believe and how much not. As to this monster's so called fascinating power, I have a theory about it which you shall have another time."

"And your friend Monella; what does he say about it all?"

Manleth hesitated.

"Well," he said, "between ourselves, Monella is himself a living mystery. I met him first on shipboard when we were both 'homeward bound' on our way to England. At least I was; he was on his way to South America. I have lived with him for five years, yet I know, in one sense, no more of him than I did at the end of the first week. I know not what countryman he is; he seems to speak every language known and unknown—and certainly one or two that must be almost prehistoric, I should think. When we arrived here he picked up the language with such ease that it seemed rather like recovering a once familiar tongue than learning one he had never heard. He appears to have been everywhere, to have done everything. Not that he is any boaster; far from it.

"This I do know—he is a right good fellow, a loyal friend, and an upright man, with a kindly, sympathetic nature; hard as nails, strong as a Hercules, bold as a lion, a wonderful fighter and leader, full of energy, of resource, of sound judgment and prevision. So much for the practical side of his very complex nature.

"For with all that, he is a dreamer—'a dreamer of dreams,' and a believer in dreams. A man with an unwavering belief in his own destiny that nothing can displace. He faces every danger with such reckless courage that we often remonstrate with him; but for answer he will smile and say, 'It is not my destiny to perish here,' or words to that effect."

"A strange man, from your description. Yet I can well believe all you say. I *felt* it, somehow, the first time we met."

"It is so with every one; but his effect on all is not the same. Most love him, but some there are who fear and hate him. But all their dislike, and all they try to do, avails naught against him. He merely thrusts it aside disdainfully, and goes serenely on his way, like a man who brushes away a cobweb from his face."

"Have other people ever come here besides you two?"

"I have heard so, but cannot tell you much about them. But it is certain that many years ago a priest drifted here with some companions. They are all dead long ago, but they converted a portion of the islanders, and that's what all the row's about."

"It caused a split and a civil war, for the other section are idolaters. Their leaders are believed to be magicians. 'Tis an inexplicable land, in fact; a land of milk and honey, of practical, industrious people, and yet, withal, a land of dreams and fancies."

"Why do not more come here? Why is the very existence of the place unknown to the outer world?"

"That also is a puzzle; but it would appear that there are deep channels in the rocky shoals by which we are surrounded which, though they have undercurrents, are, on the surface, normally choked with the weed. At rare intervals, however, owing to some unusual combination of wind and tide and outside currents, strong surface flows set in along the channels, forcing aside the weed, and so making a clear waterway, that traverses all our inside seas, and finally finds a way out to the ocean on the other side.

"On such occasions the channels are free to navigation, and they remain so for a few days—seldom for more than a week. This may happen once or twice in a short time—a few years—and then it may not occur again for a century. So they say; I cannot tell you more."

"Then our chance of ever getting away is doubtful?" remarked Wydale ruefully. "Is that so?"

"I am sorry to say it is. But they have astrologers here——"

"Astrologers?"

"Yes; and they are said often to be able to foretell the time—at least, approximately. Certainly they predicted your arrival about this time, and, further, that your coming among us would bring victory and peace and happiness to the land forever after."

"No wonder they have given us such a welcome, then, and shown such readiness to make the lady a queen," laughed Wydale. "But I'm afraid they will be very much disappointed. If we had firearms it would be another matter. As it is, we are but a broken reed to lean upon. The question is, will they in their disappointment turn and rend us?"

"I trust not—I think not, from what I know of them. And they believe, too, firmly in Monella, and he, I know, will be a firm friend to all of us."

"Dreamer though he is?"

"Dreamer though he is," returned the doctor laughingly. "But you will find that as a fighter—in warfare—he is no dreamer, but very practical indeed. It's fortunate he isn't on the other side."

Then Wydale entered into a brief relation of the adventures of himself and his friends. But soon the talk was interrupted, for they were getting near the fortress, and Owen found his attention taken up by all that he now saw.

Many small boats had come out to meet them, and their occupants, first adding their ringing cheers to those of the fleet, drifted past and fell in astern. And now Wydale perceived two lofty towers connected by a bridge high in air, with ramparts on the outer side, and beneath, great water gates, giving access to an extensive harbor. Through these gates, and through others again, the Saucy Fan moved slowly on, on all sides being seen fluttering flags, and people all waving handkerchiefs, scarfs, or banners, and joining in the shouts of welcome.

The masts of the brig went easily under the aerial bridges, and soon she was floating in the waters of the inner harbor, which was now crowded with boats of all kinds, decorated in a hundred curious fashions. Here, while the vessel was being brought to a standstill, Monella and Dareville, who had been making their preparations, put a match to the carronade, and the loud explosion that ensued went booming across the water, repeated again and again from the rocks like the thunder's roar, and dying away in a sullen growl.

At once a dead silence fell upon the crowd. They seemed stupefied, and gazed at one another in astonishment and alarm.

But Monella lifted his arms and addressed them in some words that Wydale could not understand, at the same time taking Vanina by the hand, as though to introduce her to the populace. Then the cheers rang out again still louder, and amidst them the brig was brought alongside a quay, and soon all was in readiness for landing.

"That was a good idea firing the little cannon," observed the doctor. "It will impress them. I heard you had a little powder; how much is there?"

"Only one small keg. It won't go very far, even in royal salutes," and Wydale shook his head.

"We must see whether we can't make some more," said Manleth cheerfully. "I am a chemist, and, with a sample to start with, I am not sure we could not manage it."

"Heaven send you may. From all I can understand it would be almost worth its weight in gold."

"More," said the doctor tersely. "They have more gold here than they know what to do with."

CHAPTER XI.—PRINCESS IDELIA.

THE party landed, and proceeded through the city, passing now through tastefully laid out gardens, with glowing flowers, shady bowers, and cool,

plashing fountains, and now through wide streets of noble buildings, making their way ever upward toward a stately palace that occupied the highest point on this part of the island. 'As they mounted broad flights of steps that led from one terraced garden to another, views could be obtained stretching far over the interior of the island.

Wydale saw that, as in the larger island, the interior formed a sort of basin, or crater, shut in from the sea by precipitous cliffs, but here and everywhere were signs of cultivation and successful agriculture. Fields, meadows, parks, and groves, running streams and small lakes, were everywhere to be seen, with browsing cattle scattered among them. Overhead flew great flocks of birds, and the lakes and streams were full of water fowl. Most noticeable of all were numbers of cranes that were to be seen on every hand, flying overhead, or walking in their solemn fashion, like dainty ladies, picking their way through the streets and gardens. Evidently they were privileged birds.

"What are all these cranes doing here?" Wydale asked the doctor, as they walked together behind the rest.

"They are tamed and trained to look after the other birds," was the reply. "And wonderfully they do it, too, as you will see another day. They are also good companions when you make friends with them.

"I have a couple that will follow me anywhere, if I but call them; and they are just as companionable here as dogs elsewhere. They will fish for you, catch the other birds for you, carry messages, and make themselves useful in a number of ways."

"And why is the other island so deserted, and this so thickly populated?"

"I have already stated that the people are said to have been driven away by certain terrible monsters, real or fancied. It is believed that these creatures, whatever they are, cannot fly high enough to pass over the cliffs that everywhere shut in the interior of the larger island. Therefore here—in fact anywhere outside—you are safe from them."

"But you have other gruesome monsters outside—gigantic cuttle fish, to wit."

"Ah, you have heard of them?"

"Yes; more than that. We were attacked by them; that was our first welcome to the place."

"H'm; now that is odd! I know they are there, because our fishing boats have abandoned that bay for no other cause. That is why you saw no signs of us when you arrived. The people will not venture there, for several boats have been attacked, and the poor fellows dragged out of them and carried off.

"Yet, when I and others have gone out to hunt for the cuttles, they never could be seen. From descriptions given to me, I think they are enormous calamaries. Only two are known to exist, and if we could capture them we should do a good turn to our fisher folk."

"And where are we going now?" Wydale presently inquired.

"To the royal palace, which is also the royal observatory, where are the astrologers who watch the stars through telescopes, the size of which will astonish you."

"Ah, that reminds me! there are telescopes, as well as opera and field glasses, among the cargo in our boat. I was thinking they would surprise the natives hereabouts."

"The glasses, yes; but telescopes, no. However, you will see later for yourself."

"And what are we to do at the 'royal palace'? and who lives there?"

"We are going to see the Princess Idelia; and, later, the grand old High Priest and Astrologer-Royal, Gralda, a seer said to be as old as Methuselah. You will like the princess; she is a charming lady. But don't lose your heart to her, for she is engaged to Prince Rokta, whom we shall also probably see. She speaks English well."

"Speaks English? How comes that about? Who taught her?"

"We did, Monella and I. After our arrival here, and when we could speak their language well enough, I had classes; and now there are many at the court who can speak fairly well. You see your friends chatting with them now."

"That's been puzzling me for some time," said Wydale. "I *thought* they were conversing, yet could not understand how that could be. Hullo, Georgy! Are you deigning to take some notice of your old friend, or do you feel too high in the world among these grandees?"

This was addressed to the lad, who had thus far kept close to his sister.

"I say, Mr. Wydale," said George in answer, "isn't this just splendid? But," he went on, in a low and slightly anxious tone, "don't you think, if they call sister Vanina 'Queen,' that they ought to call me 'Prince'?"

This question was almost whispered, and Wydale could not help laughing at the conceit and at the serious air with which it was advanced.

But before he could reply they were at the entrance to the palace, where they were received by officials, guards, and footmen, all attired in striking and resplendent dress, whether suits of armor or liveries. Through these they passed on into a courtyard, then along broad corridors ornamented, some with statuary, others with frescoes on the walls, of exquisite colors and design; the marble floors covered in places with soft carpets cleverly worked in fashions and patterns that were altogether new to Wydale and his friends.

At last they were ushered into a large chamber, in which about two dozen persons were assembled. At one end was a raised dais and a canopy that covered three seats or thrones of ivory and gold, beautifully carved and set with jewels. Over them, at the back of the canopy, was an artistic figure of a flying crane embroidered in gold on crimson drapery.

On one of the ivory seats was a fair young girl of about eighteen years of age. Her figure was slight and girlish, and her face was of that character of beauty that wins all hearts more by its air of appealing innocence than by its actual loveliness.

She was dressed in a simple costume of a delicate lavender—a flowing robe drawn in by a girdle at the waist—with a golden coronet upon her head. Upon her breast was a figure of a bird in precious stones, and in the coronet blazed large diamonds of extraordinary fire and brilliancy.

At the entrance of the little party the young girl turned and gazed at the

newcomers with friendly interest, and in the glance of the large, truthful looking eyes could be seen, for a moment, a curious perplexed expression. Then she smiled, and rising, advanced at once to meet Vanina. She took her hands in hers and kissed her on each cheek, then drew back, still holding her hands and regarding her with a tender scrutiny.

"And so you have come at last, Queen Sister!" she said, with a contented sigh. "And at last I see you in the flesh as I have often seen you in my dreams, and in—ah! you shall know that presently. And you see I have learned your language, so that when you came I could greet you and talk to you as a sister should. For we shall be sisters, shall we not?"

And, putting one arm round her visitor, she led her to the raised daïs, and, leaving her there seated, returned to extend a kindly welcome to the others, whom Monella severally introduced.

George she kissed, laughingly saying, "We shall be brother and sister, you and I;" and to Wydale, as to the rest, her greeting was cordial and full of grace and dignity.

Monella then turned and addressed those assembled in the room, his words been interpreted to Wydale, in an undertone, by the doctor.

"Friends! ye all know how that, long before I came among you, there were ancient prophecies extant in the land, and known unto all the people, to the effect that in the hour of your utmost need a queen should be sent to you from across the oceans to lead you on to final victory against your foes. Ye know, also, that whilst I and my friend have sojourned with you we have done all that lay in our power to fight your enemies, and to give you the advantage of the greater experience that we have derived from our travels in the outside world.

"But for want of those appliances that we know have been invented, and are now employed in warfare in that outer world, we could not help you all we wished. Our counsel, the strength of our right arms, aye, and even our blood, we have freely given; but victory has not as yet declared itself on our side. Now today the ancient prophecies are fulfilled, for behold a gracious queen, stately and beautiful even as your own princess, has come across the seas to aid you; and her name is that which we were told to look for—Vanina!" (At this there was a burst of loud applause.)

"Yes, friends! the one ye looked for has arrived; the great God has sent her at the moment of our greatest need. Let us do her all honor, and accord to her a welcome worthy of this ancient people and of the blessings and gifts Heaven has sent us at her hands. For know ye that she brings with her many wonderful gifts that shall not only aid in conquering our enemies, but shall prove blessings to the land for long years after the final victory shall have been won, and peace and prosperity shall have been secured.

"These wonders ye shall shortly see for yourselves; they are stowed away in the body of the great ship with the towering masts in which she has sailed hither. Haply, ye had looked to see her arrive in other guise, attended by fleets and armies to fight your battles for you; haply ye may feel some surprise that she should come to you in such simple guise, and attended only by two or three of her kinsmen.

"But be not deceived; it is ever thus with the blessings Heaven doth vouchsafe us—the greatest, the most precious, constantly come to us in the most homely garb. Therefore, I say, judge not by outward pomp and show; for if ye had any thought that Heaven would send fleets and armies to fight your battles, then indeed have ye been misled.

"In the countries we come from we have the proverb, 'God helps those who help themselves,' which means, to apply it here, that God will help you to fight your battles, but will not fight them for you. It is sufficient that all, henceforth, will fight with bolder, stouter hearts, because we know that the hour of victory draws nigh.

"And now, friends, your newly arrived visitors are tired, and need repose. They would leave you for a while for refreshment, and to change the garments of travel for those of the country they come to aid. In a few hours' time they will join you again, and will be pleased to receive further assurances of your welcome and ungrudging homage and support."

Having finished this address, Monella turned and spoke a few words to the princess, who invited Vanina and her friends to accompany her to another chamber; and they passed out accordingly, receiving and returning on their way the respectful salutations of those present.

They entered a gilded saloon with couches or divans around, whereon were soft cushions, while here and there were little tables. The apartment opened on to a balcony, from which could be seen, in one direction, a broad expanse of smiling landscape; in the other the frowning, perpendicular wall of cliff of the other island, with its hanging terraces and castellated walls and towers.

Only George, Dareville, Wydale, and the doctor accompanied the princess and Vanina and Monella into this chamber, and the last named suggested that the newcomers should first partake of some refreshment.

So, after a light meal, whereat were many curious dishes and strange but luscious fruits, mingled with wines of delicate and captivating flavors, during which there was very little talk on either side, the servants departed, and left the little party to themselves. Then Monella proceeded to tell what was in his thoughts.

"You must know," he said, addressing himself to Dareville and his friend, "that there have been abroad in this land, since quite ancient times, prophecies that in the time of the country's greatest trouble, in its darkest hour, and when its defenders felt themselves most sorely pressed, a ship should come across the sea carrying one bearing the name of Vanina; that this lady should become a ruler in the land, and should lead its defenders to victory, and restore peace and happiness to its inhabitants."

Here he waved his hand to Vanina, who was about to speak, to bid her keep silence for a while.

"Now," he went on, "the time of our sorest trouble seems to have arrived. This people have been driven from their ancient city—their homes in the island that belong to them—by a section of their nation who prefer to follow idolaters and sorcerers and magicians, and a cruel, blood guilty priesthood, who carry out revolting human sacrifices to obscene monsters.

"But, although thus driven from their homes, they have maintained themselves for a long period on this island—known as the island of Dilanda—by force of arms, that is, by their superiority in fighting in their war vessels. Of late, however, this has not been invariably the case; the fortune of war has gone against us—for I identify myself now with them—and we have received more than one grievous defeat.

"Emboldened by this, our enemies have been occupying themselves for some time past in the construction and fitting out of a great armada that is to overwhelm our fleet, capture our city here, and give over the inhabitants into slavery—which means that many of them would be reserved as victims for their hideous sacrifices.

"This is not all, however; I grieve to say that a strange apathy seems to have fallen upon the people, even upon my fighting men. I cannot fully understand it. No doubt they have lost heart through their recent defeats; that is but natural; but it does not wholly account for what I have remarked. And, having much pondered upon the matter, I have concluded that it may arise in part from the reliance they are placing upon these old prophecies, for they are well known among all classes.

"Their thoughts run somewhat thus: If help is coming to us from over the sea, what is the use of our striving and risking our lives meanwhile? And again, how can we hope to succeed, since we know that the hour of our triumph is not to be until our promised queen arrives?

"Such thoughts, you must perceive, are fatal to all enterprise, to all effort, even to manly courage itself; and the people I have led and have formerly found true and brave, are, I am grieved and ashamed to confess, fast lapsing into a race of cowards!"

The princess here uttered an exclamation of protest.

"Aye, aye, princess; I well know your kind heart, that likes not to hear hard words said of your people; but, unfortunately, they are true, and this is a time of difficulty and of threatening danger, and it is not, therefore, a fit occasion for refusing to look facts in the face.

"I feel assured," he went on sadly, "that, if what I hear through my spies of this armada is anything like unto truth, then to face it with our forces in their present mood will be but too surely to court defeat. Yet do I know that my men are true and loyal and trustworthy; they lack only spirit, enthusiasm, that *elan* that alone can lead men on to victory.

"At this critical time Heaven comes to our aid with what seems to be a veritable miracle. Heaven has sent us over the far seas a ship with a cargo of articles unheard of in this country, and that will excite the wonder of our people. Many of them will aid us greatly in our warfare.

"For the contents of the welcome ship, and for their use, we are able and willing to pay those in charge of her three—aye, ten times the sum they are worth in the outer world. But," glancing at Vanina, "that is only an item of the miracle; for in this same goodly ship Heaven ordained that there should come to us a maiden called Vanina, the name of her the people here have been so long expecting.

"But the maiden hesitates to accept the destiny marked out for her. She

objects that in coming here she had no special thought or conscious mission, that chance alone drifted hither the vessel in which she came—as though there was such a thing as ‘chance’ in the ordering of the world!

“In reply to her objection, I have urged that each of us is bound to accept the position ordered for us, that many, themselves unconscious of their fitness and the fact, are chosen and deputed by Heaven upon special missions; and finally, that it is her manifest duty to yield to its guidance so unmistakably displayed. For how can it be otherwise? Suppose, then, that she refuse, are we to wait for another ship with another maiden who shall bear the name Vanina? That would be waiting for a miracle in good sooth.”

The Princess Idelia turned an appealing glance upon Vanina, and laid her hand affectionately upon her arm.

“How now, my sister?” she exclaimed. “Surely it cannot be so? Yours is the golden hour—the opportunity to do great good to all of us, for which we shall be ever grateful. You hear what the good lord Monella, the leader of our forces, says. Our people want heartening, they want enthusiasm.

“I, alas! cannot hearten them, partly because I have no heart for martial deeds, partly because they look to some one else. They believe our troubles will end only when a queen named Vanina comes from across the seas to lead them on to victory.

“And now that you have arrived at last, surely our trials near their end. I gladly yield to you the place I know I can never fitly occupy. Therefore, why further hesitate?”

“But, dear princess,” Vanina said, “how can I, a stranger, knowing nothing of such matters, take from you the place that is your birthright—the place to which you must have looked forward all your life?”

“Nay, nay, regard it not so, my sister. If you refuse, soon there may be no kingdom to be governed, either by me or you. Therefore, in resigning my throne to you, I give up today only what would most likely be taken from me by force of arms tomorrow.

“And, beyond all this, I am already tired and saddened by the life we have been leading, with its uncertainties and alarms and dreadful bloodshed. If, therefore, your taking my place will bring about an era of peace and happiness for our harassed people, then do I yield it you, not only without regret, but with a joyful heart.”

“But still I see not how this that you expect can come to pass. You are making some great mistake,” Vanina urged.

“Let us do what is our manifest duty in this life, and leave the rest to Heaven,” interposed Monella solemnly. “It is not for us to refuse because we cannot foresee the designs of Providence.”

“And, finally, listen, sister. I have seen *you* again and again in my dreams. I *know* there is no other Vanina to delay for. I have seen, too, those you bring with you; and, to convince you that that is true, I can show you sketches I have made, for I can draw and paint a little. Come with me, all of you, and I will show you.”

So saying, she rose and led the way into another apartment, at one end of which a curtain hung before the wall. Pulling this aside, she showed to the

astonished company a large fresco, covering the wall, with nearly life size figures of the four, and in the background the Saucy Fan.

"There was no mistaking those depicted, and the execution of the work was excellent. At sight of their surprise the princess clapped her hands, and laughed without restraint.

"See now how my visions were impressed upon my mind," she cried. "But indeed I was at first afraid to show you this, fearing you might laugh at my ideas of art, for I have heard that where you come from you have great painters."

"We will leave you alone for a while," said Monella to the princess and Vanina. "Do you talk upon this matter, and I doubt not you will arrange it as we wish," and he motioned to the others to follow him into the chamber they had just quitted.

After some little time spent in desultory converse, Monella was summoned to the conference of the two girls, and presently the three returned together.

"We have arrived at an understanding," he informed the others. "By the laws of Atlantis, the king or queen cannot be crowned until after many ceremonies have been performed; and, further, until he or she has resided at least a year in the city in which the coronation is to be enacted.

"Seeing, therefore, that a certain period must elapse before the maiden Vanina can be formally installed as queen, it has been agreed that all proceedings to that end shall be postponed until a time of less general anxiety. In the mean time the maiden will take rank as Princess Vanina of Atlantis, and will reign jointly with the Princess Idelia.

"That, I think, my friends, will meet all our needs. The army will have their long expected Queen Vanina before their eyes, to hearten them, if it can so do; and they will be informed that she refuses to be formally crowned until such time as they shall have proved that they deserve favor by defeating her opponents. Is that not so, princess?"

Idelia clapped her hands in the impulsive fashion that belonged to her.

"That is well said," she cried. "Now have I indeed a sister princess."

"I will take the necessary steps to call together the nobles and elders, and have the matter, as set forth, confirmed by law," Monella said.

"And what do you think of all this?" Vanina asked of Wydale and her brother, coming over to them and taking them aside.

"As for me," returned Sydney instantly, "I say, 'Go in and win.'"

She looked at Wydale.

"You have known my opinion for some time," he said. "I said you always reminded me of a warrior queen. Strange that I should have had those thoughts and used those very words."

"And stranger still," she murmured dreamily, "that I seem to have been through it all before in the dreams and visions of the night."

CHAPTER XII.—PRINCE ROKTA.

WHEN the conference described in the previous chapter broke up, the newcomers were led to apartments that had already been prepared for them, that

they might rest and change their attire for costumes of the country. Of these a considerable wardrobe had been set out for them to choose from, many of the dresses being court suits of rich materials, ornamented with gold embroidery and precious stones. Dareville and Wydale found that their rooms adjoined, and the worthy doctor, who accompanied them thither, gave them the benefit of his own experience in the choice of vestments.

"We wear armor," he informed them, "only during the day, or when and where there is reason to fear attack. Here, in the town and in the palace, it is not needful. All approaches are watched and patrolled by scouts who would give timely notice of any descent in force upon the palace.

"This evening," he went on, after a pause, "there will be a grand reception in honor of your arrival. I should recommend you now to have a bath and take a rest, and when it is time, I will come again to fetch you."

That evening there was a great assemblage of the nobles and principal court functionaries, who thronged the great hall of audience in the palace, and the adjacent galleries and terraces. Their court dresses—many of them of the brightest and gayest colors, yet tasteful in design and tone—sparkled with flashing jewels, as did the hilts and scabbards of the swords and daggers each one carried.

They stood about in groups, laughing and talking, or bustled to and fro, exchanging a word here and there. Every one seemed to be in the best of spirits, and the low hum and buzz of conversation, varied by occasional ripples of laughter that were good humored without being noisy, told plainly enough of the general feeling that the occasion was both an important and a happy one.

The interior of the palace was everywhere brilliantly illuminated with hanging lamps, and formed a striking scene. Viewed from the terraces and other points of vantage in the gardens, gleams of glowing light could be seen through the windows and entrances thrown open to admit the cool evening air.

Without, also, among the statues placed everywhere about, were bronze figures holding braziers, from which lambent flames leaped up into the air, throwing around changeful, dancing shadows.

Amid it all came the soft, cool music of falling water from plashing fountains, both in the gardens and in the inner courts. But most curious of all was the fact that some of these in the gardens were themselves centers of light, their waters, thrown high in air and falling into basins below, being veritable cascades of fire.

They threw dazzling, phosphorescent gleams around, which, mingling with the dancing shadows from the braziers, added a touch of weirdness to the picturesque features of the scene. Below and beyond could be seen the lights of the city, and those upon the watch towers placed at intervals along the shore.

Here sentinels paced to and fro throughout the night, many of them, doubtless, looking up with rather envious eyes at the edifice in which, as they knew, the great meeting was taking place, and which could be seen from all parts around, like an illuminated fairy palace built high in the air. Each sentinel had beside him, upon his watch tower, other braziers charged ready for instant ignition to give the alarm should occasion call for it.

Among the groups on the terraces, Wydale and Dareville strolled about viewing with keen and lively interest all that was going on. With them were the doctor, Ombrian, the commander of the fleet, and Kremna, a young warrior, who was one of Monella's immediate followers or "aides."

He had been charged by Monella to attend the two young men. Ombrian was a tall, dark man of imposing mien, with hair and beard that had once been black, but was now just beginning to turn gray. Self contained, he was little given to talk, and, when he spoke, his voice had a certain gruffness in it that, though at first unattractive, was not unpleasant to those who had grown to know and understand him.

As to Kremna, he was a light haired, blue eyed young fellow, full of vivacity, energy, and chatter; but straightforward and brave, and devoted to Monella, and, as a consequence, ready at once to make friends with any friends of his chief.

Wydale inquired of the doctor the meaning of the "fiery fountains," as he called them. "We saw," he said, "cascades of the same character in the bay when we first anchored."

"It is a sight certainly calculated to impress strangers; it was the case with us when we first came," the doctor replied, "and it argues, moreover, much ingenuity on the part of those, whoever they were, who originally thought out the idea.

"But they only cleverly took advantage of the fact that all the sea water about here is strongly phosphorescent, and throws out vivid gleams of light whenever stirred or splashed about. Over in Atlantis are extensive grottoes and subterranean galleries in the vitreous rock—they call them here the 'Crystal Grottoes or Caverns.'"

"Anywhere near the underground galleries I went through with Monella last night?" asked Wydale.

"Precisely; yes. You must have passed through some of the galleries which lead out of the grottoes. Well, the latter are partly lighted in a very ingenious fashion; the crystal columns left in hewing out the caverns—for they are mainly artificial—are hollow, and form conduits more or less transparent, for water which is pumped up into extensive reservoirs above.

"The pumps are engines of no mean size and power, and they go on everlastingly, day and night, worked partly by the tides, and partly by the fresh water streams from the heights. The overflow runs away into the bay you speak of, and forms, at night, the phosphorescent cascades you saw there. The same principle has been applied here."

"I notice," Wydale presently remarked, "that the architecture though fine, seems inferior to that which so impressed me over in the ruins, which, you say, are those of the ancient city of Atlantis."

"That is so. And you may notice the same thing to even a greater extent in the frescoes and mural decorations here. The statues and fountains you see around, too, are mostly old; they were brought, in fact, from the old town.

"The truth is that art, and, in a measure, craftsmanship, are dying out with us; probably for want of the stimulus of outside competition to keep them up to the mark. There are few artificers here now, save armorers; these have

been kept in practice by the civil wars and struggles which have always, I understand, been more or less continuous."

"I wonder they have not exterminated one another long ago," commented Owen.

"They have done their little best in that direction, certainly," replied the doctor, with grim emphasis. "What with fighting and their human sacrifices."

"Human sacrificed!" Wydale shivered.

"Ah, yes; abominable and hateful rites they have—over in King Kara's country. There they still sacrifice human beings to their gods; and, I am told, also to feed the monstrous flying creatures you have seen. Formerly, too, there were feuds and fights with the 'Flower dwellers.'"

"What—who are they?" Wydale asked.

"In this group," replied the doctor, "besides those you know of, are some smaller islands, but only one of these is of any size. It is called Sylia, and is said to be inhabited by a terrible race—ferocious, merciless. Worse even, they say, than the Karanites because more skilled in warfare and dark sciences.

"There are wonderful tales about these people; but, thank goodness—if the tales are true—they are willing enough to keep to their own territory, and not interfere with the dwellers in the other islands so long as they are let alone."

"But what a singular name—'Flower dwellers!'"

This talk had taken place between Owen and the doctor while they strolled along in the wake of Dareville and his two companions. At times when they neared one of the groups that stood about, the conversation had been interrupted that the strangers might be introduced, and exchange a few words of greeting, and then pass on. Ombrian heard Wydale's last remark, and turned to answer him.

"The 'Flower dwellers,'" said he, in excellent English. "Ah! I have fought with them; or, rather, tried to. But you cannot; they do not give you a chance. They simply strike you dead; my men fell round me like saplings struck by the lightning. As for me, how I escaped I know not; only three of us came back."

"But what are they like?" Dareville put in.

"You cannot tell; no man has seen their faces, for they always wear masks," was the strange reply.

Further conversation was interrupted by a general move towards the central hall of the palace. Evidently some signal had been given that the hour for the audience had arrived.

When the hall was reached, a large concourse was to be seen standing or sitting round in ranks four or five deep. At one end, upon a raised platform, was a richly worked throne with high carved back in ivory and gold, and roomy enough for five or six persons to be seated upon it at one time.

It was rounded in shape, forming a semicircular background to the room. Close to it were conspicuous, standing on one side, Monella and another whose appearance at once arrested the attention of the strangers, and who was afterwards known to them as Gralda, the high priest.

Gralda was an old man of imposing presence with fine features and bright

clear eyes. His hair and beard were long, and white as snow; not so tall as Monella, he yet was of unusual height, and would have appeared still taller, but for a slight stoop. There was in the expression of his face a mingling of benevolence and world weariness; and this was emphasized by his stoop.

There was at once a likeness and a contrast between the two men, for while Monella's erect figure and great muscular frame, combined with the piercing eyes and usually alert, searching look, seemed to belong rather to a man in the very prime of life than to a graybeard, yet at times there would come into his glance that same dreamy, worldweary expression that was more or less habitual to Gralda.

Something of this must have been passing in the mind of the doctor, for he said, half to his companion and half to himself, "I would give something to know which is the older of those two men."

The remark seemed to amuse his hearer, who was about to reply, when he caught Monella's eye, and read in it, and in a slight gesture that accompanied the look, an invitation to approach him.

Monella was very plainly dressed in a sort of tunic of white, with a belt of black, and a cloak of black and white. His attire was in marked contrast, in its simplicity and absence of all ornament, with that of those by whom he was surrounded.

Gralda wore a flowing robe of a bright red, with a figure of a rising sun embroidered in gold and diamonds upon the breast. Upon his head he wore a narrow circlet, which had in the front a similar, though a much smaller figure. He received the two young men when presented to him by Monella with kindly courtesy, but, since he did not speak English, he said nothing beyond a few words of welcome, which were interpreted to them by Dr. Manleth.

And then there was first a stir, and then a general hush, and the newcomers, turning, saw entering the room a young man of striking appearance, very richly dressed, who came slowly towards the daïs with an air that was careless and somewhat haughty, yet singularly courtly and attractive. In face and figure he was remarkably—almost wonderfully—handsome.

He had the cast of features that we know as ancient Greek, with dark hair and eyes, a flowing mustache, and a supple, graceful figure that many sculptors would have been glad to be able to secure as a model for Apollo. This was well shown off by a close fitting costume of white and gold, adorned on the breast with the figure of a flying crane which, as the strangers had seen, was a common emblem in the country.

As he stepped up on to the daïs, closely followed by two who seemed to be in attendance, the doctor murmured low:

"Prince Rokta!"

Whether he of whom he spoke had heard the words, or that his turning round at the moment was accidental, was not quite clear. But so it was that he just then glanced in their direction, and, seeing the two strangers, regarded them with a peculiarly searching gaze.

Although there was nothing in the stranger's manner that was offensive, neither Dareville nor Wydale felt quite at ease; the former in particular, in the impulsive manner that belonged to him, felt tempted to resent it.

But Dr. Manleth quickly introduced them; whereupon Prince Rokta greeted them in an easy manner, and with a smile, speaking a few words in very excellent English. Then going up to Monella and Galda he inquired:

"What is this I hear the princess has done? Is it true that she has offered to vacate her place to put in it a stranger?"

"My son," said Galda, "thou knowest it was so arranged. Thou didst offer no objection when it was suggested the other day at the meeting of our council. The Lord Monella, who was present, will remember it."

"The prince will doubtless recall," joined in Monella, "the announcement of the expected arrival of the strangers, and the fact that he gave his consent in the event of their appearance to what has since been done."

"Yes; *if*, my Lord Monella," rejoined Rokta, with some heat. "But little did I then think that what I regarded as a fantastic dream was actually about to happen."

At this moment Ombrian, Manleth, and two or three others approached, and joined in the conversation.

"It is not a question," began Ombrian bluntly, "who is to be princess here so much as whether shortly there will be an independent country to reign over. For my part, having heard the will of the people declared today, I adopt their views."

"It seems to me," said Monella coldly, "that the prince should have been present with us today."

"How so, sir?" retorted Rokta, "have I not been about my duties? Could I go round the island to inspect all the stations in less time?"

"Still," returned Monella quickly, "thou wert told——"

"Oh, a truce to your dreams and visions! Ever since I was a boy I have heard cackle of this sort! Thou knowest well, however, that I have no sympathy with such fancies; I am a soldier, a man of action, and of deeds, and not a dreamer!"

Before any reply could be made to this unlooked for outburst, there was again a stir at the further end of the hall, betokening some fresh arrival.

This time it was the Princess Idelia, accompanied by Vanina, George, and several attendants; and there was much cheering and clapping of hands as the little procession passed up the room to the dais. As for Prince Rokta, when he caught sight of Vanina, he gazed at her with a glance that was full of wonder, mingled with very evident admiration.

Certainly she looked very charming; and dressed as she was now, in a costume after the manner of the ladies of the court, but richer far than any of those about her, it was not surprising that she should rivet his attention. Evidently the Princess Idelia in welcoming her, and offering to give place to her, was resolved not to do things by halves.

The richest dresses, the most precious jewels had been placed at her disposal; nay, she had herself insisted upon dressing her new friend, and choosing her ornaments, placing around her neck her choicest necklet, and upon her head a coronet like her own. She now advanced toward Rokta, and introduced him to Vanina with a gladsome pride that was very pleasing to behold.

"Behold, Rokta," she exclaimed, "my dear sister, our long promised Vanina; your future——"

Here Vanina put up her hand to stop further speech.

"Nay," said she, "let us not speak of the future; it will suffice just now to speak only of today. Let me, Prince Rokta, state to you my thanks for the kindly reception I and my friends have met with in this city."

Prince Rokta advanced slowly and took her hand, and, bending over it with that courtly ease which, it was plain to see, was with him a sort of second nature, he said:

"Princess, I am glad to hear what you say, and to add my welcome to that of the people of this country. Accept my apologies for having not been present when you arrived today.

"We have to be diligent and watchful, and I was away on necessary soldier's duties, making sure that all our guards were at their posts. Thus, I trust, my absence has not been without its advantages, since I have been doing my best to secure the safety of so fair a guest."

"Nay, Rokta," said Idelia laughing, "no guest at all; guests come and go, but Vanina, I trust, will stay with us forever."

"I hope so, too," said Rokta, with another bow, and glancing while he spoke into Vanina's face with a look so full of meaning that she flushed and showed confusion.

But Idelia put her arm round her and drew her aside.

"Come and sit down," said she. "There are many waiting to be presented to you;" and she took her to the center of the throne at the end of the room.

Meanwhile Manleth introduced Vanina's two brothers and Wydale to the prince, who received them with much favor, and with George he was soon engaged in animated conversation, the boy; quite at his ease, giving a lively narrative of some of his adventures.

Then, to the strangers' great surprise, there came into the hall a band of musicians. They were provided with harps and other instruments of novel design, but—as soon appeared—very effective and sweet in tone.

This orchestra played first some concerted pieces, the like of which none of the newcomers had ever heard before. In them the most tenderly conceived melodies, full of a dreamy fascination, were intermingled with passages of such rugged harmony and weird, moving power, that those who heard them for the first time were astounded.

Never, in the outer world, had they listened to such music; never would they have dreamed that anything so charming, so fascinating, yet so different from anything they had heard before, could have been produced by such curious, almost uncouth looking instruments.

When, after a little while, there came a pause, Vanina sighed.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" she exclaimed—and in what she said she expressed, besides her own, the feelings of Wydale and her brother. "I have never heard music that has so deeply moved me. Truly, you must have some great masters of the art here to be able to produce such music and such players."

Idelia laughed and clapped her hands, according to her wont, when pleased.

"Listen to that, all of you," she cried, and she looked round. "In one thing, at least, then, we can both surprise and please our friends. But you shall listen to more of this another time. We go on now to the dancing. Let us see whether you will enjoy that, too."

And she insisted, with friendly persistence, that her guests should join in the dances which ensued, notwithstanding that these were, of course, quite new to them. There was no lack of good humored assistance on all sides, and the strangers managed to acquit themselves fairly well, entering fully into the spirit of the entertainment. Vanina found a willing instructor in Prince Rokta, who danced with her many times that night.

Some time later, during a pause in the dancing, Prince Rokta went up to Monella, who was standing in the center of a small group aside, and, extending his hand to him, he said:

"My Lord Monella, I have to express my regret, and to ask your indulgence for what I said a short time ago. Little did I think that your dreams and prophecies would end in bringing us such a gracious and a charming visitor. I am sure she is, indeed, well worthy to be our queen, and I only regret that I was not one of the first to greet and to bow the knee to her."

Monella acknowledged this speech with a dignified inclination of the head and one of his curious half smiles, but made no direct reply.

That night, after the festivities had ended, Wydale, walking slowly and alone to his apartment, met Monella, who laid his hand kindly on his shoulder, and, gazing at him keenly, said:

"My son, you seem unhappy and disturbed. This is not a good beginning for your stay among us."

Wydale glanced up at him, and something in the look he read there gained his confidence.

"I fear," he said sadly, "there is trouble in the air."

"Aye," said Monella, "there is trouble in the air."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A DEED.

He did a deed, a gracious deed—
He ministered to men in need;
He bound a wound, he spoke a word
That God and every angel heard.

He did a deed, a loving deed;
Oh, souls that suffer and that bleed,
He did a deed, and on his way
A bird sang in his heart all day.

Robert Loveman.

A DASH FOR A THRONE.*

BY ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT.

Author of "By Right of Sword."

Being the recital of the many striking adventures that befell a man who died to one identity and entered upon another wherein he was called upon to assume still a third—How he became entangled in an intrigue whose goal was the throne of a kingdom, and the part he played in the plotting.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

A lieutenant of the Prussian navy, who tells the story, becomes involved in a quarrel with the prince, his future emperor. He finds, that to avoid disgrace by court martial, he must encompass his own death within a week.

Dr. Mein, an old friend, causes the young man to fall ill, and apparently die. A mock funeral takes place and to the world he is dead. He goes on the stage under the name of Heinrich Fischer. Four years later Dr. Mein, having made him his heir, Fischer retired, not, however, before he has aroused the anger of a certain actress—Clara Weylin, who suspects some mystery in his past and swears to discover it.

While looking for some new career Fischer becomes identified as Herr von Fromberg, nephew of the Prince von Gramberg. As the real owner of that name denies his own identity through purely personal reasons, Fischer determines for the time to play the part.

On being conducted to the castle, he learns that the Prince von Gramberg has just died, making his daughter, Countess Minna, sole heir. Fischer soon finds that she is betrothed to the Count von Nauheim, one of his former enemies, and with this count he soon has a wordy tiff, becoming at the same time close friends with Herr von Krugen and Herr von Steinitz, two gentlemen who had been in closest confidence with the late prince.

Fischer finds that he is in the midst of a political intrigue to overthrow the mad king of Altenwald, and to put in his place the Countess Minna, who, her brother Gustav having been killed in a duel, is the rightful heir. Her future husband, the Count von Nauheim is keenly interested.

Fischer goes in search of the real Von Fromberg, finds that he has become a Frenchman, changed his name to Henri Frombe and drawn up a declaration renouncing his heirship to the house of Gramberg. This document he gives to Fischer, whereupon the latter, making up his mind definitely upon the rôle which fate has thrust upon him, goes back to the castle as Herr von Fromberg.

He goes to Braunstadt with Von Nauheim, and learns there through Juan Praga, the duelist, that Von Nauheim is a traitor, an agent of the Ostenburgs, that there is a plot within a plot by which the mad king is to be deposed and the countess ruined by Von Nauheim, when the throne of Altenwald will perforce go to Duke Marx of Ostenburg.

After mapping out the campaign to Praga, and receiving his pledge of fidelity, Von Fromberg attends a meeting of the barons of Braunstadt, whom he forces by his diplomacy to his support.

Returning to Gramberg, he arranges that the Countess Minna shall be impersonated at the ball by her maid, and then hurries back to Braunstadt for another interview with Praga.

CHAPTER XIII.—A CHECK.

MATTERS were now hurrying fast to a crisis; and I hoped the result of my journey would be to complete all my preparations and leave me nothing to do but return to escort Minna to Braunstadt.

This story began in the December issue of THE ARGOSY. The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.

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So far all had gone well enough. I had no reason to think that either Heckscher or Von Nauheim had the remotest idea that I knew of their treachery; and it was, of course, of the very essence of my plan that they should remain in ignorance.

On this account I was unwilling to meet Praga again personally, and I resolved, therefore, to send Steinitz to him as soon as we reached Braunstadt, to tell him my intentions, and to get from him in return what he believed to be the Ostenburg move.

I myself went straight to Baron Heckscher. He received me with apparent cordiality; but it was not difficult to see that as the day of the crisis drew near his anxiety was growing.

"All is going well, I hope," I said, after I had greeted him. "We have all our preparations made."

"All is going very well," he replied. "But you are a day earlier in Braunstadt than we anticipated."

"I have not come to remain," I answered, "although I have some important business. My cousin is not well; and her nerves are giving way as the day approaches. I have difficulty in keeping her courage up. Like a woman she has some foolish fear that at the last moment something will happen to her—some disaster to overthrow her. But I have nearly conquered that fear, I trust."

"How?"

"She associates the fear with her visit here, and I have assured her that night and day, every hour and every minute, she herself will be surrounded by absolutely stanch friends, who would give their lives for her. The death of her brother just at the moment when success seemed to be within grasp, is frightening her. Nor is that unnatural, especially when we reflect that her nerves have again been strained by her father's death."

My words had the effect I desired. It did not suit his plans that Minna should be guarded in this way.

"The countess is not ill, I trust," he said, after a pause.

"Oh, no, not positively ill. But she is very young and so full of alarms that even I myself am inclined at times to question the wisdom of all this." Perceiving the value of the line I had taken, I went on to make the most of it.

"Indeed, I want some very confidential talk with you. You understand that I am resolved to go on, and I have not breathed a word to suggest to her that there is even an alternative course; but there are two points on which I wish to consult with you. In the first place, is it quite impracticable to abandon the thing? I am convinced my cousin would only too gladly renounce all claim to the throne."

He looked at me sharply and with manifest consternation.

"It is absolutely impossible, prince, absolutely," he said emphatically. "But you are not in earnest. Why, it would be madness, sheer madness to think of such a thing. Since you were here we have sounded men in all directions, and there is not one who is not enthusiastic at the idea of getting rid once and for all of this madman."

"But my cousin can only make a weak queen at the best."

"My dear prince, her weakness will be the strength of the country. Our great object is not so much to change the person of the ruler as to break the traditions of the ruler's power—to put on the throne some one whose title will rest not on any divine right, but on the people's power and will and choice. A woman will thus be far more dependent on the people than a man. Prince, the countess cannot draw back."

"But supposing she were willing to acquiesce in the election of the Ostenburg heir, and thus unite all sections of the people?"

"It is impossible, equally impossible," he exclaimed readily. "It would be a betrayal of us all. It is not to be thought of."

I sat as if thinking this over; but in truth this prompt rejection of the means to do fairly what I knew he was plotting to do by foul, had filled me with anger.

"And what would be the immediate consequences of a withdrawal?" I asked.

"Do you mean the personal consequences to the countess and yourself?" he asked with a suggestion of contempt that we should hesitate for such consideration.

"I mean to all concerned."

"What could but be the consequences where three fourths of a nation had been worked up to desire a revolution and found themselves cheated at the last moment by the—the timorousness of those in whose name and for whose sake the whole movement had been carried out? The badge of cowardice is a hard one to bear, prince, and the anger of a disappointed people would not lighten the disgrace."

"We are no cowards, Baron Heckscher," I replied warmly, as if stung by his taunt.

"Then you must not so act that people may mistake you."

"We will not," I returned with an air of angry decision.

"I was sure of it, and am only sorry you thought it necessary to even moot the suggestion. But now, what is your second point? Not another objection, I hope."

"It is merely to discuss with you the last arrangements. Under the circumstances you will, I am sure, see the necessity of making them as simple as possible—indeed, my cousin's health will not permit anything else."

"Up to the moment of our great coup they cannot possibly be too simple. Anything else would be a great mistake. Up till somewhere about midnight of this day week, Wednesday next, the countess is, of course, no one but the very charming young lady that I am assured she is—I mean, she is a private person. In that capacity, she will attend the reception; and in order that there may be no suspicion attaching to her making a public appearance so soon after her father's death, it has been arranged that a special desire for her attendance shall be expressed by the king. She will merely attend, kiss hands and pass through the presence chamber, and leave the palace at once, should it be desired. She can return home and go to the ball, where she should be at about ten o'clock.

"She must be at hand, of course, when the great drama is played in which

we are to take part. When the act of abdication has been read, you will lead her forward. That is all. We shall do the rest."

"And what will follow then?"

"I think she should stay at the palace. It is just in the few hours succeeding that scene that we shall have to be alert. The king will be missing, and a council of state will be called on the following morning, when she will be proclaimed to the country. After that events will settle themselves rapidly. We are prepared with a petition to the imperial authorities which will be signed by nearly every man of influence in the country, to recognize the succession and validate the abdication."

"But that act of the king will surely be found to be a forgery?" I said.

My companion smiled and shook his head.

"On the contrary, it will be genuine. We should not use such clumsy means as forgery. We have it already written. For once his majesty's lunacy has done his subjects a good service," he said bitterly. "He was minded recently to play a farce of abdication in favor of one of his hounds, declaring with his customary facetiousness that the Altenwalders were dogs and a fit king for them would be a hound. Accordingly, he held what he was pleased to call a privy council—consisting of himself and his dogs.

"But those about him knew their business, and when he thought he had abdicated in favor of his dog, they fooled him to the top of his bent, but drew the document in such a way that the insertion of the countess' name would be an easy matter. The addition of a date will make everything complete; and thus, when the madman thought he was only insulting his people, he was in fact signing away his throne. He had this dog, a clever poodle, seated in the chair in the council chamber, garbed in state robes and crowned with the crown of Altenwald. I tell you, prince, that one act would stir the blood of even a nation of cravens—and we Altenwalders are no cowards. My blood boils at the thought," he cried, clenching his fist, while his eyes flashed and his face, usually immobile and cold, lighted up with the fires of passion.

I joined him in a hot burst of indignation.

"But the time is past for mere anger," he said presently. "We are resolved to act; and that farce of his shall cost him dear. As to Berlin, so soon as we have driven home the conviction that we are in dead earnest and that practically the whole country is with us, there will be no opposition. The usual official intimation will be published that the king's health has failed, and the rest follows naturally."

"But you are forgetting the Ostenburg interest."

"I forget nothing, prince," he replied, somewhat curtly. "I know the public feeling. The very inaction they are showing will make the Duke Marx impossible in the eyes of the people. While the country has been writhing under the insults and iniquities of this madman, what have the Ostenburgs done? Has one of them raised a finger to help the people or protest against this royal mumming? Has any one of them said a word? And how do you suppose the nation is to interpret that silence and inaction, except as approval of what has been done? They had the better right of succession and a strong following on their side; they have forfeited the one by their

apathy and have lost the other as a consequence ; ” and he went on to give many reasons for this conclusion.

“ I admit,” he said at the close, “ there will be some anxious hours just after the Countess Minna is proclaimed ; but with all the will in the world, they can do nothing. I tell you there is nothing can stay our success or shake your cousin’s seat on the throne when she has once taken it.”

I allowed myself to appear to share his convictions, even while I marveled at the depth of his duplicity, and I then told him the plan of our movements.

He listened closely and made several suggestions, which I said we would adopt ; and he quite acquiesced in my view that during the time Minna was to be in Braunstadt, she should remain in the greatest seclusion, giving audience only to himself and two or three others.

When I left him my task in Braunstadt was practically finished so far as he was concerned ; but he advised me to attend a reception at the palace on the following day but one, the Friday, and I agreed.

I felt sure I had left the impression I had gone to create—that their best time for abducting Minna would be at the moment of her return from the palace ; and I completed my arrangements on that basis.

Steinitz was waiting for me at the hotel with an important communication from Praga, giving me the particulars of an intended attempt to carry off Minna from Gramberg during the night ; and though it seemed to me a mad scheme enough and pretty certain to be abandoned after my interview with Baron Heckscher, I despatched Steinitz post haste back to the castle to put Von Krugen on his guard.

Whether it were abandoned or not, the fact that we had knowledge of it would render it certain to fail, and I felt no great anxiety on that score.

But I soon had cause for anxiety in another direction. The two men whom I had asked to visit Gramberg had not been there, and we were in fact perilously shorthanded for all the work that had to be done. I was the more anxious, too, to get extra help because of a weak spot in my plans which I could not remedy without further assistance.

If the Ostenburg agents held the person of the king and I checkmated them at the last moment by producing Minna and keeping their duke in confinement, there was a chance that they might counter my stroke by bringing the mad king back on the scene and thus checkmate me in turn.

The only means of preventing this would be to secure that those who held the king in custody should be loyal to Minna ; and it was for this part of the scheme that I had hoped to make use of the two men, Kummell and Beilager. I at once set out to find them.

I chanced upon them together at the house of Kummell, and it did not take me a minute to perceive that there was a decided restraint in their manner toward me. I had meant to be perfectly frank with them, telling them, indeed, all I knew ; but their attitude made this impossible, and for the moment I was at a loss what line to take.

While gaining time to think I talked at large upon the importance of the affair generally, and at length asked them point blank why they had not been to Gramberg.

"We have been very busy," replied Kummell, who spoke for both; and the answer was rather curtly given.

"Scarcely a sufficient reason, gentlemen, in an affair of this sort," I replied in quite as curt a tone. "Nor I presume, the only one."

They hesitated and glanced at each other.

"I think you must excuse us if we do not answer the question. In point of fact, I am not yet in a position to do so."

"I cannot understand you, and under the circumstances I must really press you very closely to be frank with me." I urged; and although they still hesitated and equivocated, I was resolved not to leave without an answer, and I told them as much.

"You put us in a very awkward position, indeed, but the fact is we had intended to make the visit and had fixed the day, when we were advised not to do so by Herr Bock."

"And who is Herr Bock, pray?" So utterly unsuspecting was I of any possible mischief that I put a good deal of indignation into the question. Yet it was a blunder of the grossest kind, and the reply astounded me utterly.

"Herr Bock is your own lawyer who has been negotiating the sale to me of your late mother's property."

That confounded property again!

My four years' training on the stage stood me in good stead now, and I masked my surprise with a laugh, as I exclaimed:

"Oh, that Bock! I did not know it was you who were contemplating a purchase. But why should that keep you away from Gramberg? Were you afraid that a look at the property would put you out of conceit with the bargain, or that I should charge you more, thinking you were growing eager?" But there was more in this than a laugh could carry off.

"No, but he has been in communication with your old family lawyer, and together they say or think they are on the track of some kind of strange complication which I believe in some way touches yourself—how I do not know; but Bock advised me to wait."

"This has a somewhat serious sound, sir," I said sternly enough to cover my apprehension.

"I cannot help that. You asked me, pressed me indeed, for an answer to your question. In times like these you will understand I feel great need to be cautious—overcautious, perhaps you may deem it. But still there it is."

"And what is the nature of this supposed ridiculous complication?"

"You must excuse me if I say no more. You know Herr Bock's address here in Braunstadt." The scent was getting warm.

"I shall, of course, see him," I answered readily. "And I will find a short method of dealing with a couple of meddlesome attorneys—as soon as this business of next week is through. And what then do you propose to do?"

"I think we had better not discuss any matters except in the presence of Baron Heckscher."

I rose to leave. I had met with my first serious check.

"I thought I could have relied implicitly upon your loyalty to the house of Gramberg," I said loftily.

"To the house of Gramberg, yes," was the answer, stolidly spoken, yet with a significance I could not mistake.

I went back to my hotel, angry and apprehensive. I could have twisted Von Fromberg's neck for his maladroitness in hurrying to sell his property and then getting beyond my reach and keeping there.

Moreover, I could not see what to do. These two bungling old fools of lawyers had no doubt been comparing notes and probably comparing the different handwritings of Von Fromberg and myself; and had hatched a pretty cock and bull story about me. Probably they were already making all sorts of inquiries.

Yet I dared not go and face the man, Bock. I could not tell if he had ever seen Von Framberg. If he had, he would proclaim me an importor straight-away, and Heaven only knew what the consequences of such a step would be at such a time.

On the other hand, the two men I had just left were obviously suspicious of me. Knowing nothing of the double plot, it was as likely as not that they viewed me as some kind of spy and traitor, either from the mad king's party or the Ostenburgs; and they would go blabbing their suspicions to every one.

And all through that greedy renegade, Von Fromberg.

I paced my room like a caged beast, searching every nook and cranny of my mind for some device to stop these fools of lawyers. Everything might be jeopardized. This pair of blundering meddlers might even now be in Charmes and face to face with the real man; and the truth might come flashing over the wires at any moment.

But all my anger brought me no nearer a solution. There was just one chance—that Von Fromberg might stay away on his honeymoon long enough to get us over the business of the next week; and to that fragile reed I must trust.

Certainly I myself must not take the time necessary to go to Charmes, and as certainly there was no one I could trust with the secret. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to wait and be resolved to fight when the time came.

I was in this state of excitement when a servant came and said a lady wished to see me.

"A lady?" I cried in astonishment. "What is her name? It must be a mistake. There can be no one—Stay, show her up," I broke off, for it occurred to me that after all there might be some one with information to give or sell; or, perhaps, a messenger from Praga. It would do no harm to see her.

She came in very closely veiled, and very beautifully dressed.

"You wish to see me, madam? What is your name?"

She stood silent until the servant had left the room; and I looked at her with considerable curiosity.

"So you are the Prince von Gramberg. I trust your highness is in excellent health."

Despite the mocking accent I could recognize the voice, though I could not recall the speaker. It was certainly no one whom I ought to have known as the Prince von Gramberg, and I accordingly made ready for another unpleasant surprise.

"I am sorry I cannot recall your name; I think I have heard your voice. It is too sweet to forget." It is never wrong to flatter a woman.

My visitor stamped her foot angrily.

"Yes, you know my voice and used to like to hear it."

The little impatient, angry gesture told me who she was—Clara Weylin, the actress who had pestered my life out at Frankfort and had vowed to be revenged on me for slighting her.

I wondered what particular strain of ill luck had brought her across my path at this juncture; and I wished her and her pretty face and sweet voice at the other end of the earth.

The coils were indeed drawing closer round me.

CHAPTER XIV.—THE ABDUCTION.

FOR another week at least I dared not make an enemy of my altogether unexpected and vastly unwelcome visitor, so I answered her with a smile and went to greet her with outstretched hand, as though glad enough to renew our old acquaintance.

"I know you now," I said cordially. "Of course, it is my old friend and comrade, Clara Weylin. This is an unexpected pleasure," I added warmly.

But she stepped back and did not take my hand.

"Unexpected, no doubt; but pleasure, scarcely. You were not much of an actor at any time, but that would not take in a fool. You are very much astonished to see me and equally angry; so you may as well acknowledge it." She stamped her foot again. Next she removed an outer veil, which she had, of course, put on to mystify me on her entrance; and she stood staring me in the face with a look of defiant hostility.

I shrugged my shoulders and said:

"You are always more beautiful in a passion, Clara, but I'm sorry to find you in one now with me. Won't you sit down and tell me all about yourself?" and I recalled regretfully our last interview, and bitterly deplored my stupidity in not having answered her letter. An angry woman, knowing what she knew, could do no end of mischief at this juncture.

"The chief thing about myself, as you say," she exclaimed spitefully, "is that my feelings toward you have changed. I was your friend then, now I will be your enemy."

"Then I am very sorry to hear it,"—and the tone was genuine enough. "But under the circumstances, why take the trouble to come and tell me so?"

"Because I wished to see your highness, to observe how your highness bore your great honors, and to bask in the radiant light of your highness' eyes—ugh! Your highness, indeed."

I began to hope. Her bitterness was so very bitter that I thought some of it at least might be assumed.

"How do you play at that game, Clara?" I laughed. "While you are 'basking' what should I do?"

"Not flatter me with lies about being glad to see me," she burst out angrily. "When you would rather have seen the devil."

"I won't go so far as that," said I lightly. "I don't admire the devil, and I always did admire you; though if you wish me to be candid, I would much rather have seen you at another time."

"Perhaps, after you are married," she cried, with a vicious glance.

"I did not say I wished never to see you again," I returned.

"You used not to lie even by implication in the old days," she said, showing she understood me.

"Nor you to insult me without implication," I retorted. "But I wish you would sit down. It is just as easy to be an enemy sitting as standing."

She sat down, and I thought her expression was a little less wrathful.

"Now, then, just tell me plainly why you think it worth while to come here, why you are such an enemy, and what particular injury you think and wish to do me."

"Much more than you seem to imagine," she exclaimed sharply, her eyes flashing again.

The answer pleased me, for it seemed to show that I was successfully concealing the alarm which her visit had caused. Certainly I must not let her have an inkling of the fact that she could really do any harm.

"You are a most incomprehensible creature, my dear Clara. During the years I knew you, I paid you as great a compliment as a man can pay a woman—by holding you in the highest esteem, and entertaining for you the most honorable admiration. And you repay it—by this."

"You flouted and laughed at me and scorned me," she cried vehemently.

"You mean I did not make love to you. Let us be frank with each other. Being what I was, I could not make love to you honorably; and because I held you in too high esteem to do so dishonorably, will you say I scorned you?"

"Your highness kept the fact of your noble birth very secret," she snapped with an accent on the "highness" I did not like. I began to fear how much she knew.

"I had the strongest reasons; but it was not done to make so clever a woman as yourself my enemy."

"Then you succeeded unwittingly. One of the prerogatives of your sudden and unexpected inheritance."

"Well, we are fighting the air—an unprofitable waste of effort. If you won't tell me as a friend anything about yourself, then as an enemy tell me in what way I can oblige you by letting you injure me."

She laughed unpleasantly.

"So you are not altogether free from alarm that I can injure you. You are right, I can."

"All Braunstadt is open to you," I answered with a show of indifference.

"Why do you want my Duke Marx lured out of the way next Wednesday?"

She dealt the thrust so sharply and watched me so keenly that I marveled at my own self control in hiding all sign of my consternation.

"Who is your Duke Marx? And what on earth do you mean?" I asked, my wits busy with the thoughts which the question started.

If she was the decoy on whom Praga relied, she was in love with him, and her motive in coming to me was just sheer revenge and woman's rage. She held the very kernel of my scheme in her hands and could blight it in a moment, revealing everything to the other side. Perhaps she had done so already.

What a fool Praga had been to trust such a woman! And yet how was I to gauge the power and extent of her love for him, and say to what it might not drive her. All this rushed through my head to the accompaniment of the soft, musical, mocking laugh with which she greeted my question.

"I thought you did not lie by implication," she said.

"I thought so, too," I answered, speaking at random, and waiting for a cue from her.

"You are a clever man, prince—if prince you really are, and not merely a daring adventurer—but you have left out of your calculations what a woman's revenge may do."

"My dear Clara, we all expect the unexpected in a way and never prepare for it." I rose from my chair as if to close the interview. "Whatever you wish to do, please go at once and do it."

"I will," she replied, rising also and going to the door.

If she left the room, the plan would be at an end. I felt that; and I would have given all I had in the world to feel able to stop her. But I dared not show a sign of weakness. I should be in her power forever; and the scheme would be wrecked.

I held the door open for her, keeping my face set and expressionless.

At the door she turned and looked at me, right into my eyes, when our faces were within a few inches of each other.

"You will be sorry for this," she cried, almost between her teeth.

"I never regret my decisions, except as they injure others," I replied coldly.

She started and stamped her foot and still stood staring hard at me. I thought I knew the struggle that was shaking her. It was a fight whether her old hate for me or her new love for Praga was the stronger. Her excitement and passion increased with every second that the contest endured.

"I hate you," she cried vehemently. "I hate you; and I can ruin you."

I made no sign of having even heard the words.

I thought she was going; when suddenly her love gained a sweeping victory.

With impetuous force she wrenched the door from me and slammed it to with great violence, and seemed almost as if she would strike me in the face.

"You are a coward and a bully," she exclaimed hysterically. "You only act like this because you know I dare not do what is in my power." Then she turned and rushed back to her seat, where she covered her face and burst into a storm of passionate tears.

I took a curious course. I left the room. I did not wish her to think I had been gloating over her defeat. I scribbled a hasty note that I had been called away, and should be glad to see her another time; and left this to be given to her.

This interview had the necessary effect of increasing my uneasiness materially. Each day seemed now to be revealing a fresh weak spot, and the chances of failure were growing fast. Now it was not only the failure of the plot that threatened me, but the disgrace of personal exposure.

I had had no dishonorable motives in the personation of the Prince von Gramberg; but the consequences threatened to be entirely embarrassing; and had there been no one else to consider but myself, I should have thrown the thing up then and there.

But there was Minna; and her helpless and precarious position made retreat on my part quite impossible. It would be dishonorable to think of myself at such a time; while every chivalrous instinct in my nature made me keenly anxious to secure her safety.

But I must see Praga and hear from him precisely how matters stood in regard to Clara Weylin, and how far she was likely to betray us. With much difficulty and in the face of considerable risk of my communications with the Corsican being discovered, I succeeded in getting the interview with him. He came to my hotel disguised, and after much trouble in shaking off the spies, who, he declared, were now always dogging his footsteps.

Matters were as I had surmised. The actress was in love with him, and they were to be married. She had played often in Braunstadt, and the Duke Marx von Ostenburg had become infatuated with her. He was persecuting her with proposals, and was in that calf stage in which he would do anything and risk anything at her bidding.

There was not the least doubt in the world, declared Praga, that the woman could lure him anywhere she pleased with such a bait as she would pretend to offer.

The two had, indeed, concocted a pretty little scheme between them, in which she and the duke were to be together, and Praga, as the injured lover, was to interrupt them. Then, they calculated that the duke, to save his skin—for his courage was not of very high quality—would consent to do anything that might be demanded.

The actress had come to Braunstadt to put the matter in course, and, hearing of me only incidentally as the Prince von Gramberg, she had had no suspicion that I was in reality the Heinrich Fischer, against whom she had always nurtured her revenge, until a chance meeting with me in the street had revealed this to her.

I told Praga, of course, all that had passed between us, and questioned him closely as to what she was likely to do. He declared his readiness to answer for her as for himself; and I had no alternative but to be contented with that pledge. Then we discussed many other points of the plan, and so arranged that there need not be another interview, unless unforeseen mishaps arose.

Before he left, my momentary hesitation had passed, and I resolved to go on and to trust to my wits to get out of any awkward consequences that might come.

But those few days in Braunstadt were among the most trying of any in my life. I passed them in a fever of suspense, anticipating all sorts of trouble;

constantly on my guard; suspecting every one with whom I came in contact; and in such a condition of strain and tension that when I returned to Gramberg to fetch Minna, she could not but notice with deep concern how worn and anxious I looked.

"This is wearing you out, Cousin Hans," she said very gently. "You look more like a student now, and one who has been burning far too much midnight oil."

"There are only two or three days now, and then the worst will be over," I replied cheerfully; but I would have given the world to have been able to tell her what was my chief anxiety. "Braunstadt does not agree with me, I think."

She looked at me searchingly.

"Is it that secret of yours?" she asked quietly. "When will you share it with me?"

"Probably after Wednesday," I answered, smiling. "But you will believe me loyal to you whether you hear it or not?"

"Loyal? A quick way to make me an enemy would be for any one to hint the contrary."

"You may have your faith tested yet."

"Does the secret concern me, then?" she asked quickly, adding with a smile: "I think I am glad if it does. I thought——" and she stopped. I hoped I could guess the thought.

"It touches the question of my loyalty to you and my presence here."

"Then I do not want to hear it. I would trust you if the whole world turned against you and sought to turn me also. I do not care now what it may be," she cried earnestly, so earnestly that she brought the color in a great rush to her face, and while still flushed in this way she asked: "You do not think anything could shake me?"

"No, I do not;" and my love was very near declaring itself as I spoke.

On the journey to Braunstadt her manner to me was so gentle and tender and confiding, that I scarcely ventured to look at her, lest she should read in my eyes the latter secret, that I was now guarding even more jealously than the former; and in Braunstadt I would not trust myself to be alone with her during the day and a half that preceded the ball.

We stayed in the large mansion in the middle of the town that now belonged to her, and had been the residence of the late prince; and while there we carried out to the letter the plans I had arranged.

Only a few persons came to see Minna—Baron Heckscher and one or two others. Von Nauheim called, but she refused to see him, pleading illness.

During the whole of that time we kept the strictest and closest guard over her, watching vigilantly day and night. The house might have been in a state of siege indeed. But no attempt was made to approach her, and I gathered therefore that the other side had taken my bait, and had chosen the moment for their attempt which I wished.

The maid who was to personate her on the return ride from the reception was coached and drilled in every particular of her part; and every detail even of dress was most carefully considered and decided.

I began to feel that, after all, my fears had been premature, for not a hint or suggestion was dropped anywhere to show that any further discovery about myself had been made. But none the less, I was in a condition of much inward concern when we started for the reception at the palace, Minna, the Baroness Gratz, and myself being in the carriage.

Everything went without a hitch, however. I was in the presence chamber when Minna kissed hands, and it was with a feeling of genuine pleasure that I noticed almost immediately afterwards Baron Heckscher making his way to me. He came up and engaged me in conversation; and I knew that his object was to keep me occupied so that Minna would leave the palace without my escort.

I raised no difficulty; and entered into a vigorous argument with him on some point about which I knew little and cared less.

When he thought he had kept me long enough to serve his purpose he left me, and I strolled slowly through the magnificent rooms, taking heed of the many quick glances directed at me; and I walked out to the entrance hall. I wasted a little more time there before I told the servants to call my carriage and inquire for my cousin.

More minutes passed, and presently they came and told me my carriage had already gone and the Countess Minna in it. I made a show of annoyance at this; and then some one came forward with the offer of his carriage.

I declined it, of course. Now that they believed they had Minna, I might look for an attack on myself at any moment.

I had told Von Krugen to be ready in the lobbies to watch for Minna in her changed dress and to see that she reached home safely and secretly; for we had determined that after all it would be best for her to return in her disguise to the Gramberg house, rather than go to any other place. As I could see no trace of him anywhere, I concluded Minna had already gone, and I set out on foot.

I was very anxious, of course, to learn the result of the plan, and it was with infinite satisfaction that I met Von Krugen and heard from him that Minna was safe in the house, and that the carriage with the Baroness Gratz and the servant had not returned.

The next thing was to simulate our agitation on account of Minna's supposed absence; and my task was to find Von Nauheim and keep him under such observation as would prevent his getting to see the girl who had been carried off in Minna's place, and so find out the trick we had played.

After waiting half an hour I changed my court dress, took my swordstick, thrust my revolver into my pocket, for I did not know what I might have to face, and set out.

CHAPTER XV.—A TREACHEROUS ATTACK.

It was not until I was being driven to Von Nauheim's house that I saw a blunder in my plan.

I ought not to have left the palace at all, nor to have allowed Von Nauheim to be for one moment out of my sight. I had seen him while I was in conver-

sation with the baron; and he had indeed appeared to keep near me ostentatiously. This I attributed to his wish to make me dissociate him from the attempt on Minna; and I knew he was at the palace when I left.

But he had now had half an hour's grace, and it was obvious that I might have trouble in finding him, and further that he might use the time to get to see Minna's double, supposing she had not been carried too far away.

My suspense during the short drive was very keen. While all was going so well, I myself had endangered the whole scheme by this act of incredible shortsightedness.

But at his house I was relieved.

When I inquired for him, the servant told me he was at home.

"Has he been long back from the palace?" I asked indifferently.

"Not very long, your highness; about half an hour," said the man.

I breathed freely once more. It was better luck than I had deserved.

"Show me to him at once," I said sharply.

The room was empty when I entered, and the man explained that his master was dressing, and that he would announce my visit. Suspicious of trickery in even small things, I kept the room door open lest Von Nauheim should attempt to slip away while I was shut up inside it.

But he made no attempt of the sort, and after keeping me waiting long enough to try my patience, he came in smiling and wearing an air of insolent triumph.

"Ah, prince, so you've come to pay me a visit, eh? I thought you were never going to enter my doors again. My man told me it was urgent business, too. You look a bit out of sorts. What's up?"

"I come with very serious news," I said.

"Egad, you look it, too," he broke in. "What's the matter?"

"That our whole scheme has fallen through. My cousin, I have every reason to fear, has been carried off by the Ostenburg agents."

"Carried off by the Ostenburgs! Why, man, what nonsense is this!" he cried, with an air of incredulity. "Half an hour ago she was kissing that lunatic's hand."

"Nevertheless, what I say is true. When she left the throne room she and the Baroness Gratz entered the carriage to return home, and the carriage has never reached the house. I cannot account for it," I cried, as if amazed and baffled. "That is the only moment she has not been under the strictest guard and watch. But she has gone, and what can it mean but that they have got her?"

"You mean to say, you were so foolish as to let her drive through Braunschweig alone, or rather with no one but a silly old woman with her, on a day like this and at such a crisis. Well, you took the responsibility of guarding her and must put up with the consequences. But I can't believe it."

"The thing is just as I say," I answered, watching him closely. He pretended to think; then he shook his head, and replied:

"You must have jumped to a wrong conclusion altogether. The thing's monstrous. I expect she's just ordered the coachman to drive about the city a bit, to show off her fine clothes; and is back by this time."

"You know her too well to think anything of the sort. She has a very clear knowledge of the dangers surrounding her."

"Then you shouldn't have taken her out of my control. And why do you come to me. The last time you were here you made quite a theatrical scene, after which you and I were to be strangers, I thought. Why then come to me now?"

"You have an even closer interest in this part of the plot than any one else. She is your promised wife; and it was my duty to acquaint you first with what had happened, and get your assistance in any search to be made."

"You're wonderfully mindful of your duty all of a sudden," he sneered. — "Now that you've got us into this mess, you come whining to me to get you out of it."

"I've come out of no regard for you," I answered warmly.

"You come quite as willingly as I welcome you. Believe that. And what do you want me to do?"

"You had better join me in searching for her."

"Thank you—for less than nothing. I am to be put to the trouble of trying to find her, in order that you may once more have the pleasure of keeping her away from me. I think you had better go and do your own spy work."

We were each deceiving the other, though I had the clue to his attitude; and we were both wasting time in quarreling which, had we been in earnest, we should have been only too eager to spend in the search. My motive was, of course, to so occupy him that he would have no time to go to the girl; and his object was to keep me as long as possible from making inquiries to trace Minna.

I let him appear to have his way, and we spent over an hour, wrangling, disputing, and recriminating.

At last he exclaimed that it was no use for us to quarrel; we had better go and tell the news to Baron Heckscher and consult him. So long as we remained together I did not care where we went nor whom we saw; and after he had occupied a very long time in changing his dress again—time wasted purposely, of course—we drove to the baron's house.

He was a far better actor than Von Nauheim, and his consternation and anger were excellently assumed.

"It is ruin to everything. How could you allow it, prince? We have placed the most precious charge in your hands; have left to you what it was your right as the only male relative of the countess the right to claim, the most delicate work of protecting the person of our future queen—and now this has happened. I am astounded, dismayed, completely baffled. I had not the faintest idea that even a soul among the whole Ostenburg circle had a thought of what we were planning; and now, just when everything is all but ripe, this calamity has fallen like a thunderbolt."

And he continued to lament in this fashion at great length and with most voluble energy, an exceedingly artistic waste of much further time.

"Heaven knows what may happen next," he cried later on. "If these men get wind of who has been in the plot, the whole city will be red with

murder. For God's sake, prince, be careful. You must be, of course, associated with the unfortunate countess as her relative, and as the late prince's successor, and I warn you most solemnly to be on your guard, to be most careful and vigilant."

It was a clever stroke, and I understood it well enough. I was to be attacked, but my suspicions of any complicity on his part were to be silenced by this warning.

"My life is of no account; I will not live, indeed, if through my lack of care, anything happens to my cousin," I exclaimed passionately. "Death would be my only solace." And this was made the text for a further and longer discussion, until at last Baron Heckscher cried out:

"But what are we doing? Wasting time in unavailing discussion while that innocent girl may be enduring God only knows what."

I sprang to my feet also as if equally distressed. We had occupied hours of valuable time where minutes would have sufficed had we really been in earnest; and the hour when we were due at the ball was fast approaching.

"But what of tonight's proceedings?" asked Von Nauheim.

"We must go forward as if nothing of this had happened. I, for one, am all against giving up until we are really beaten. I will cause inquiry to be made at once in a hundred different quarters by our friends and agents; and maybe we shall yet find the countess in time for tonight's work. Is not that best?"

I pretended to demur.

"I fear it is useless. Cannot everything be put off until my cousin is found?"

"No, no, far safer to go on," answered the baron a little too eagerly. "Even if we cannot present the countess as the future queen to the people tonight, we are almost sure to be able to find her before tomorrow; and we must make the best excuse possible for her absence."

I raised more objections, and thus wasted more time, only giving way in the end with apparent reluctance. Nearly another hour passed in a fresh, heated discussion, and when we separated it was ten o'clock.

I calculated that Von Nauheim might safely be left now. I had kept him without food for five hours; and I knew he would barely have time to rush home, put on his fancy dress costume, snatch a hasty meal, and get to the ball at the appointed time for the meeting of the chief actors in the night's business.

I was soon to have evidence, however, that if I had been active in my preparations, my antagonists had also been busy, and had laid deliberate plans for my overthrow at that very moment.

When I left the baron's house I found to my surprise that my carriage had gone.

"You can't even keep in touch with your own servants, it seems, when you want them, to say nothing of guarding the Countess Minna," sneered Von Nauheim.

"Apparently not," I answered; but my momentary chagrin was merged the next instant in the thought that this was probably no accident.

I remember that Von Nauheim had left the room once for a few minutes, and I read the incident as a danger signal.

"We'd better have a cab called," he added, and he sent off a servant. When the man returned with one, my companion said: "Come along, prince, we've no time to lose." For a moment I hung back, but reflecting that I had better not even yet show my hand, I followed him.

The man drove off slowly at first, and as the vehicle lumbered heavily along, I felt in my pocket to make sure that my revolver was ready for use in need.

Von Nauheim was obviously nervous. At first he whistled and drummed with his fingers on the window and peered out into the streets. It was a dark night, and the coachman had left the main road and was taking us through some narrow and ill lighted streets, and was driving much more quickly.

"Where's the idiot taking us?" exclaimed Von Nauheim, assuming a tone of anger. "Doesn't the dolt know his way?"

"He shouldn't have left the main street, should he?" I asked unconcernedly. "Tell him which way to drive. I don't know it."

He put his head out and called to the driver, and a short altercation took place, which ended in Von Nauheim bidding him to drive as fast as he could since we were in a furious hurry.

The man now whipped up his horse, the cab traveling at a very quick pace indeed, rattling and jolting, swaying and bumping over the rough road with great violence. I began to think there was a plan to overturn it, and take the chance of dealing me some injury in the consequent confusion when I might lie in the wreck. But there was more than that intended.

I did not know the district in the least, but I knew we had already been much longer in the vehicle than should have sufficed to carry us either to Von Nauheim's house or to mine, and I thought it time to put a check on the little play.

"Stop him," I said to my companion. "I am going no farther in this crazy thing. He's either a fool or drunk, or worse."

"What are you afraid of?" he returned with a laugh. "We're going all right. I know where we are;" and I saw him look out anxiously into the dark.

"Well, I'm going no farther;" and I put my hand out of the window and loosened the handle of the door, while I called to the driver to stop. I would not turn my back to Von Nauheim for fear of treachery.

"He can't hear you," he gibed. "Put your head out of the window and call him, unless you're afraid of the dark;" and he laughed again.

The situation was becoming graver every moment, and I cursed myself for having been such a foolhardy idiot as to have stepped into a snare set right before my eyes. The carriage was traveling at a high rate of speed, and I had no doubt that I was being carried away from Braunstadt, in order to prevent my being present at the ball.

To jump out was impossible without giving my companion an opportunity to deal me a blow or a stab from behind, which, even if it did not kill me,

would certainly disable me at a juncture when everything depended upon my retaining the fullest use of every faculty and every ounce of strength I possessed. Yet I suspected that to sit still and do nothing was to allow myself to be carried into some carefully prepared ambush, where the consequences might be even worse.

"I believe you are afraid of the dark," said my companion after a pause; and I could see in the indistinct, vascillating light that his face wore a confident, sneering look of infinitely malicious triumph.

I felt it would be madness to let him carry the matter farther.

"There is some devilment here," I said sternly. "This is all preconcerted. Stop that mad fool out there, and let's have no more of it."

"What do you mean? How dare you——" Then he stopped suddenly, and I saw him rise from his seat and look out through the front windows of the carriage.

"By God, what does it mean?" he exclaimed excitedly.

His face had lost all its jaunty, blustering expression and had turned gray with sudden fear. "He's fallen off the box, or jumped off," he cried in a tone hoarse with panic.

It was true. The driver had disappeared, and the horse, freed from all control, was stretching himself out at a wild gallop.

"For God's sake, what had we better do, prince?" cried the coward, turning to me in positively abject fear.

It was my turn now to smile. His precious play had broken up completely, and instead of having got me into a snare, he had brought himself into a mess that was likely enough to cost him his life.

"It serves you right," I growled with a rough oath. "You'll be lucky if you get out of this mess alive."

He was a coward through and through, and the revulsion of feeling from triumph at having tricked me into his power, to the realization that he himself was in dire peril, was more than his nerves could stand. He groaned and covered his eyes, as if to shut out the danger, and then fell back in his seat, limp and flaccid, like a girl in a terror swoon.

There was nothing more to be feared from him, and I turned to consider how to help myself. I opened the door of the swaying, swinging carriage, and endeavored to ascertain what would be the consequences of a leap out into the road.

I could see nothing except in the feeble oscillating, fitful light of the lamps, while the door bumped and dashed against me so violently that I had to grip hard to prevent myself being thrown out altogether. It seemed impossible to hope for escape that way.

Yet I did not know the road; and for aught I could tell, any minute might find us dashed to pieces. To sit still, therefore, and wait for the worst to happen was at least equally perilous.

I thought of trying to clamber on to the box seat, so as to get control of the horse; but, with the vehicle swaying and bumping as it was, the chances were ten thousand to one against it. And if I fell in the effort, I should be under the wheels.

Then an idea occurred to me—to wound the horse with a revolver shot. It was desperate, but all courses were that. The light from the lamps shone on the horse sufficiently to let me see where to shoot, and gripping with my left hand on to the door frame, I leaned out as far as I dared, and, taking careful aim, fired.

I missed the horse altogether, or grazed him very slightly and frightened him, for I felt the vehicle give a violent jolt to one side and then forward, being nearly upset in the process. Then it dashed onward at a greater speed than before.

I leaned out once more, and getting this time a clearer aim, I fired again. There was a wild and desperate plunge, during which the carriage seemed to stop dead; then there was a terrific smash; and the next instant horse and carriage were lying in an indistinguishable heap in the middle of the road; and I found myself unhurt a few yards off.

I got up and ran to look for Von Nauheim. One of the lamps was still burning, and by the light of it I made a discovery that told me much. The horse was no ordinary cab hack, but a valuable beast worth a place in any man's stud. This was clear evidence to me that the whole thing had been planned.

My companion was lying under a heap of the wrecked carriage; and after much trouble I hauled him out, laid him by the roadside and endeavored to find out whether he was much hurt, or had only become unconscious from sheer fright.

I could not get him round, however, and as my presence in Braunstadt was too essential to admit of my remaining with him, I was just starting to walk back, meaning to send him help as soon as I could find it, when I heard the voices of men approaching.

I was still suspicious of treachery and instantly on my guard.

"Is that you, Fritz?" called a voice through the dark. "Why didn't you come on to the proper place?"

I jumped to the conclusion that these were the men who were waiting in ambush at the spot where the carriage ought to have taken me. But I did not know who Fritz was, unless he were the driver who had fallen off the front of our carriage.

"We have had an accident here," I called in reply, muffling my voice. "And the Prince von Gramberg has been badly hurt."

"Is that your honor speaking?" asked the voice again.

"Come along quickly," I cried. "Fritz"—I blurred the word so that it might pass for any name—"has fallen off the box. You know what to do with the prince. I must return at once."

"We know," was the answer. "Your honor's horse is here"—and a man came up with a led horse.

"Do your work properly," I said as I clambered into the saddle. "And mind, he's a bit delirious. Pay no heed to what he says till you get my instructions."

And with that I clapped my heels into the ribs of my borrowed horse and galloped off through the dark, laughing to myself at the thought that

Nauheim himself had fallen into the clutches of the very rascals in whose hands he had designed to leave me.

CHAPTER XVI.—THE BALL AT THE PALACE.

THE count had good cattle, and the horse that carried me back to Braunstadt answered gamely to the calls I made on him. At any cost I must get back to the house at the earliest possible moment; and though I did not know the road, and could see scarce a dozen feet ahead of the horse's ears, I plunged along at a hard gallop, trusting to his instinct and my own luck that had already stood me in such good stead that night.

I had not much difficulty in finding the way, and I reined up twice to ask it of people whom I met; and at last I chanced on a man on horseback, who rode with me to within a few doors of my destination.

I kept a wary eye about me as I rode into the courtyard of the house; and my first act was to call a groom on whose discretion I knew I could rely.

"Take this horse round at once to Count von Nauheim's stables," I told the man. "And say he has requested you to bring it. Don't mention my name. I wish you to find out whether the horse is one of his, but not to say a word to show that I have sent you. Report to me immediately on your return. I must have your news before I go out tonight."

The man mounted and was off instantly; and, as I had expected, he brought me back word that the horse was one of the count's stud.

In the mean while my arrival allayed the very reasonable alarm which my prolonged absence had caused. It was long past the time at which we were to have started for the ball, and all the others were dressed and waiting for me impatiently.

Von Krugen came to me with a telegram which had arrived some time before, and as I tore open the envelope with feverish haste I told him the pith of what had happened. The message was from Praga, and, to my intense relief, it was worded as we had agreed it should be if all went well.

"Caught mail. Arrive by first delivery."

Innocent words to read, but meaning much to me. The Duke Marx had been secured and Praga himself was coming on to Braunstadt at the earliest moment.

I was glad enough of this. If these attacks were to continue, the stronger force we had the better.

"The countess is full of anxiety to see you, prince," said Von Krugen, when I had told him the news.

"I will go to her directly, but I must dress at once. See that something for me to eat is got ready directly. Is there any news of the Baroness Gratz or of the girl?"

"None; there is not a suspicion of the trick."

My spirits were rising fast, for everything was going well. Despite all their devilment, I was master of the position. I held their man in my clutches; and before the night was a couple of hours older, they should see openly enough that I had outwitted them. But it was exciting work.

Before hurrying to put on my fancy dress costume—I was going as a French courtier, a dress in which I could wear a sword and could conceal a revolver easily—I went to Minna's rooms to let her know I had returned.

She came to me looking so radiantly lovely that I gazed at her in rapture. We had chosen her dress with a care for the part she had to play that night, and she wore a double costume.

In the first place she was to have a plain dark domino covering her entirely from head to foot, the head, of course, to be hooded and the face entirely concealed by a large mask. But underneath this she wore a gorgeously brilliant dress as Maria Theresa; the rich magnificence of the costume being further set off by a profusion of jewels of all kinds, which sparkled and glittered with dazzling brilliance. On her head as crown she wore a splendid tiara of magnificent pearls.

This was all arranged of set purpose. My object was that in the first part of the evening she should run no risk of recognition at all; and that in the second, when I led her forward as the actual queen, she might produce the greatest possible impression of queenly wealth, grandeur, dignity, and loveliness.

If the impression on others were only half as striking as it was upon me, I should be more than satisfied; and if a beautiful and queenly presence could win adherents, there was not a man in the ballroom who would not be on her side.

She enjoyed the effect of her loveliness upon me, and stood smiling with bright eyes as I gazed at her.

"Shall I do, cousin?" she asked with a dash of coquetry.

"The most lovely vision I have ever seen," I cried.

"Not vision, Cousin Hans," she said, shaking her head and shrugging her shoulders till the million facets of her jewels gleamed with iridescent luster. "Only flesh and blood—and rather frightened flesh, too. I was beginning to fear for you. What has happened?"

"All is going splendidly," I said; but I could not keep my eyes from her. "You are a queen indeed," I added. "If all queens were like you, royalty would have no enemies. You will make a profound impression tonight."

"I am satisfied, if you are pleased," she answered. "But I am afraid of tonight's work, Hans," she added nervously. "I shall be glad when it is over, and we are all safe back here."

"If all goes well, you will sleep in the palace tonight as queen elect of Altenwald—the queen of us all."

"No, no; I don't wish that. I wish to be here among my friends. I feel safe here. I should be frightened there."

"Your friends will be with you there also. You do not think we should desert you? By tomorrow your friends will have multiplied to half a nation."

"But my enemies—what of them? That is my fear."

"I hold the hostage that will silence them, and—but trust me and all will be well—better I hope than you can think. We have played a hazardous game, I know, but I have just heard that the move which must decide it in our favor has been made successfully."

"I wish I could feel your enthusiasm," she said rather sadly.

"I have you to enthuse me," I cried. "And for your sake——" I stopped. I was losing my head in the craze of her beauty.

"You would what?" she asked, putting her hand on mine and setting me on fire with a look which I thought and hoped I could read.

I thrust away the almost maddening temptation to say what was in my heart and thoughts.

"I would remember that there is yet much to do," I said stolidly, dropping my eyes.

She snatched her hand away and turned away from me with a toss of the head.

"I wish I had never gone on with this," she exclaimed impetuously. "It was not my wish. I should not have done so if you had not persuaded me—no, I don't mean that at all. Forgive me, cousin. I am so thoughtless," she cried, changing again quickly. "I know all you have done for me, and I am not ungrateful. Forgive me." She came again and put her hands back into mine. "I am such a poor queen, even for a sham one."

This was even more trying than before, and I had to fight hard to hold myself in hand. But I succeeded.

"Don't speak of forgiveness; there is nothing to forgive. What lies before us tonight is enough to make any one anxious. I can understand you."

"Can you?" she answered, peering with shining, eloquent eyes into mine. "No, no, no, a hundred times, no. But I am glad you like my dress and—I will try to bear myself tonight so as to be worthy of—of—all you have dared for me."

"God grant we may all come safely through it, and that tonight may see you queen indeed," I replied fervently; and I was putting my lips to her hand as a sign of my homage, though I meant more, when she drew her hand hastily away.

"I am not queen yet," she exclaimed; and I was wondering at the meaning of this little action all the time I was donning my courtier's garb.

Her changefulness puzzled me. Sometimes I hoped—well, I scarce know what I was not fool enough to think; and at others I feared. But my hopes were stronger than my fears on that account, and had there not been such important work on hand that night, I think I could not have resisted putting the ball to far other use than its promoters had projected.

I could not drive with her to the palace, as it was necessary that I should arrive alone; and I had procured an invitation for her in another name. Von Krugen was to be in constant attendance upon her, with urgent instructions never to let her out of his sight; and Steinitz, who was also garbed as a courtier and carried a sword, was to be an additional guard, remaining at a distance and keeping in touch with me, so that I might know where to find Minna at the instant I needed.

In order that there might be no difficulty in my recognizing her, supposing there were another domino of the same color and shape, we had had a small cross of red silk sewn on each shoulder.

I was very busy with my thoughts and full of anxiety as I drove away. So far as I could see now, my plans were complete. I had the Duke Marx in my hands; I had outwitted my opponents, and could produce Minna at the very moment when they, reckoning on her absence, would have pledged themselves over the hilt in her cause; no one had breathed a hint to show that my assumption of the part of the prince was more certainly known than a few days previously; and I had a fairly accurate knowledge of my opponents' tactics and aims while they were ignorant of mine.

It was probable enough that my appearance at the ball safe and sound after Von Nauheim's attempt on me would cause some consternation, and no doubt I must be well on my guard for the rest of the evening. I was very late in entering, but that would only give color to the supposition that I had been trapped by Von Nauheim; and I thought I might perhaps turn it to account by surprising something out of the men who did not expect me.

With this object I fastened my mask very firmly—it was a large one and hid my features successfully; and taking a hint from my old stage experiences, I humped up one of my shoulders, limped on one leg, and in this way hobbled with the gait of an old man into the ballroom.

It was a brilliant scene indeed. The magnificent suite of rooms was decorated in the most lavish manner, each in a different style and period; and the garish blaze of light in places contrasting with the soft seductive tints of others; the artistic combination of decorative coloring; the changing play of the electric fairy lamps of every conceivable hue; the grouping of hundreds of palms and ferns with contrasting masses of gorgeously colored flowers; a thousand guests in all the exuberant splendor of the most exquisite costumes, and the sparkling glitter of myriads of jewels—all this made up a scene of positively gorgeous fascination.

To me it was a great stage, on which all the people present were but supers, walking, dancing, chatting, laughing, and love making, to fill up time until the really important characters should have their entrances called.

Near to the door, as I entered, a clown was fooling clumsily and awkwardly, passing silly jests in a disguised voice with all who jostled him.

I knew him directly. It was the mad king; and on the sleeve of his clown's tunic I saw the mark that told us who he was. Round him in busy hum I heard loud whispers about the greatness and cleverness of the king; and every now and then he would stop his silly jesting to listen to these comments.

"'Tis easy to see thou art a soldier, old hobbler," he called to me, and ran and planted himself in my path and peered up in my face.

"Why's that, clown?" I asked in an old man's voice.

"Because thou canst not help shouldering arms," he cried, humping up his own shoulder in ridicule of mine; and at the silly jest the crowd round burst into roars of loud court laughter, with cries of "How excellent!" "What wit!" "Who is this great jester?" and a hundred other notes of praise of his wonderful clowning.

I passed on, not ill pleased to have been mistaken for an old man, and I made my way slowly round the grand rooms looking for the men I had to

meet, and wondering why the king was still at large. I kept turning to look back at the place where I had met him, and when at length I saw that he had gone, I judged that this meant he had left to change his costume, and that the occasion of that change would be seized for the purposes of the plot.

And just as I noticed that, a voice, which I recognized as the Baron Heckscher's, fell on my ear.

"It is long past the hour. Something may have happened."

"I have suspected him from the first. It spells treachery," said another. It was Herr Kummell.

I had reached the far end of the suite of rooms, and at the back of me was a deep alcove or small anteroom, at the mouth of which the two men were standing, some others being farther inside. I guessed they were speaking of me, and I stood concealed by one of the pillars which supported the domed roof, and kept my back to them, listening with all my ears.

"I do not wish to think that," answered the baron in a tone of assumed reluctance. "But what you have told me is very extraordinary."

"He has purposely put her out of our reach. You will never find her. I am for letting matters pass. If he were here I would tell him to his face what I think."

It was certainly nothing less than a disaster that the two men who of all those in the scheme were really loyal to Minna and should have been of the utmost value in coöperating with me, were, through the unfortunate turn of things, suspicious of me and hostile. I could, of course, do nothing now to undeceive them; but it was an additional aggravation that Minna's supposed disappearance should have been made to appear as the result of my treachery.

"We cannot go back now," I heard the baron say. "Indeed, the curtain has drawn up already. The king has gone for his change of dress."

They turned then into the alcove to join the rest, and I moved away. Soon afterwards I dropped the shuffling gait of an old man and walked to the alcove with quick, firm footsteps.

"Good evening, gentlemen," I said. "I am late, but that is no fault of my own."

My arrival produced an evident surprise, and even the astute Baron Heckscher showed some signs of it.

"You are indeed very late, prince," he said. "We had begun to fear that you were going to fail us at the last moment."

"Have you found the Countess Minna?" asked Kummell. "Or, perhaps you have been detained searching for her?" His voice rang with contempt.

"That is a question we should put to Baron Heckscher here," I answered, in a tone which made the latter start and look at me. "I mean, of course, that he almost pledged his word to find her in time for tonight's work. Have you any news, baron?"

"I have every hope that all will yet be right," he said.

"Those who hide can find," said Kummell.

"They can; and I wish they'd be quick about it," I assented curtly. "But we have no time now for discussion. We have to act. And I shall be glad to be informed how matters stand. Are all the arrangements complete?"

Kummell and his friend Beilager, the baron, and I had been standing apart from the rest, who were grouped together, engaged in a low but animated conversation, of which I did not doubt I was the subject. Baron Heckscher moved across to the larger group as I put the question, and I took advantage of the moment to say to Kummell in a low, earnest tone:

"You have done me the ill turn to suspect me, and before the night is out you will have cause to admit your error. I shall rely upon you implicitly to stand by your loyalty in what is to come tonight. Afterwards we can have an explanation if necessary;" and without giving him time to reply, I went after the baron.

A short and hurried statement of the present position of things followed, the pith of which was that all was in readiness, and we might expect the news at any moment that the final coup was to be made.

A few minutes later a messenger hurried into the alcove and spoke to the baron, who then turned to us, and in a low tone said:

"Gentlemen, the king is ours. God bless the new ruler of Altenwald."

A murmured echo of the words from all present was drowned by a loud fanfare of trumpets and thumping of drums from the other end of the domed hall, and these heralded, as we knew, the coming of the king's substitute.

We moved out at once to take our places for the big drama, and I looked round anxiously for the dark domino of Minna.

As I caught sight of her in the distance, I found that my heart was beating with quite unusual violence and speed.

CHAPTER XVII.—CHECKMATE.

THE entrance of the mad king's understudy had been arranged with scrupulous eye to effect. The king himself had ordered all details, and they were carried out exactly as he had planned, on a scale of ostentatious and almost insane extravagance, in which he was wont to indulge.

The supposed king was made up to represent a Chinese emperor, the full robes offering effectual concealment of any difference between the figures of the king and his substitute. His head was bald save for the ornamental headdress, and the long coal black pigtail. His features were entirely concealed behind the skin mask of a painted Chinese face drawn very tight, life-like, yet infinitely grotesque; and his robes were gorgeous, and most costly, embroidered with thousands of jewels in the quaintest of Chinese designs.

He was seated in a royal palanquin borne by eight men in hideous garb, each wearing a skin mask of the same kind as the central figure; and as they put down their burden in the middle of the hall, they turned in all directions and set their faces grinning and mouthing and grimacing with a most ghastly effect. The palanquin itself was decorated and bejeweled in the same lavish prodigality with which the lunatic king was accustomed to squander his people's money in trifles and fooling.

So gorgeous and costly was every appointment of it, indeed, that even while the spectators marveled at its brilliance, they cursed the wastefulness that made it practicable.

But it was quite impossible to mistake the whole thing for anything but a royal freak; and those present did not need the private mark that was as usual on the arm, to reveal to them that the bowing, grinning, sumptuously appareled figure that sat amid the cushions of the palanquin, squeaking out gibberish in a high pitched voice as though indulging in Chinese greetings, was their king.

The whole scene was too characteristic of him.

Behind the palanquin, grouped with clever regard to color effects, were the members of a numerous suite, all attired in rich Chinese costumes, while musicians, playing upon all kinds of extraordinary instruments, clanged and clashed, trumpeted and drummed, squeaked and groaned in a medley of indescribable discords and unrhythmic jangle.

Yet in all the babel and confusion there was the method of shrewd organization and carefully thought out plan.

When the first effect of the dramatic entrance was over, the bearers took up the palanquin, a procession was formed, and the courtiers and musicians, reinforced by a number of dancing girls and men, made a progress round the ballroom, and at last grouped themselves about and around a raised dais, on one side of which stood an improvised throne.

A program of dancing was then gone through, followed by a number of ceremonial acts, all intended as a preface to the chief performance, for which we were waiting so anxiously—the play of the formal abdication.

During the whole of this fantastic business my excitement had been growing fast. I knew that with comparatively few exceptions all the people present were dead against me and in favor of the Ostenburg interest. For months, for years indeed, they had been working, striving, and plotting for the end which they now thought to be within their reach.

Among them, as I had had abundant evidence, were men desperate enough to stop short of no excesses to gain that end; and yet I was seeking to checkmate them in the very hour of success by a single bold stroke.

All the men who had taken a leading part in the plot had dispersed among the audience, each having a definite part assigned to him. I myself stood apart, leaning against a pillar, with Steinitz not far from me; and when the procession had just passed me a deep voice close to my ear said:

"A striking ceremonial, prince."

I looked round and thought I recognized the lithe, sinewy form of the Corsican, Praga, whose glittering eyes were staring at me through his mask.

"Very striking. Who are you?" I asked cautiously.

"I carry the tools of my trade," he replied, touching lightly his sword.

"And I am badly in want of work."

"Why are you here?"

"I am a sort of postman—I bring news of the mail." I understood the play of words and knew him by it for certain.

"And what is the news?"

"Of the best—except for one thing." His tone alarmed me somewhat. We drew away then from the crowd, and standing apart together, he told me what had happened.

"That Clara is a devil, prince, and we must beware of her. She hates you, and has been torn in two ways by this business."

"What do you mean, man? Speak out. Where is the Duke Marx?"

"Safe, and where no one will find him. Drunk as a lord should be. She lured him out to Spenitz; and when she had got him separated from his servants, drove with him to the house at Friessen alone"—this was the place we had secured for the purpose in a lonely spot some fifty miles from the city.

"He would have gone to the world's end in the mood she worked him into, and I chuckled louder every fresh mile we covered."

"You—what were you doing there?" I asked in astonishment.

"I was the driver, of course. We wanted no servants. There was no place for them, and once we started from Spenitz, I vowed that he should go on if I had to brain him to get him there. Bacchus, but he's a fool!"

"Get on with the story, man," said I impatiently. "I want to know what you fear is wrong."

"He went out like a lamb, protesting only now and then that he must be back soon, and must be in Braunstadt tonight—but she stopped his protests with a kiss; and the fool was as happy as a drunken clown. We reached Friessen, and then the play began. While they were billing and fooling in the house I slipped a saddle on the horse's back in place of his harness, went out on to the road, and after I'd given him less than half an hour with Clara, I came galloping up to the house at full stretch, for all the world as if I'd followed them every yard of the way from Spenitz; and I rushed into the room with my sword drawn, sputtering out oaths and vowing I'd have his life on the spot."

"Well?"

"There's a good assortment of cowardice in that little body of his. He has too many good things in this life to wish to leave it, I suppose; for he could scarcely make enough show of fight to make it plausible for Clara to rush in between us, throw herself on her knees, and with a clever bit of acting pray that there should be no bloodshed. I blustered and raged, and at length consented to spare his wee chip of a life; but I forced him to swallow an opiate that made him as drunk as a fool and will keep him quiet for a dozen hours or more. Then I bound and gagged him, to make doubly sure, and locked him up in an underground cellar. We can keep him there a close prisoner for a month, if need be, and not a soul will be the wiser, unless——"

"Unless what?" I cried.

"Unless the beloved Clara should choose to say what she knows."

"Do you suspect her?"

"I don't know what she means or what she wants. She is torn between her desire to help me and to hurt you; and which will win in the end I can't say. She has done this for me; but having done it, she is singular enough to turn round and try to hit at you in some other direction. I can't answer for her; and I thought it best to tell you so."

"If you think she means to tell of his whereabouts, we'll send out tonight at once and change it."

"I can't think that, because it would be treachery to me. In fact, I'm sure

she won't. She knows me pretty well by this time, and I swore to her that if she did anything of the kind I'd wreak a bitter vengeance on her and the duke. I'll do it, too," he growled with a guttural oath.

"But what do you fear, then?"

"She is back tonight in Braunstadt for some object; and as she is deep in with the Ostenburg crowd, trusted by them, too—it is through her that most things have leaked to me—we may look for her to fend off suspicion from herself for this decoy work by striking at you in some other way. So you know what to expect."

"But if she is helping you, why should she turn against me?" I said, perplexed.

"For the best of all reasons, prince—she is a woman."

The fact that I could not solve the enigma did not decrease my disquiet at the news, and had there been time I would have taken some measures of precaution. But it was too late now. We must go on, whether to succeed or to fail; for a glance at the dais showed me that the moment for the act of abdication had arrived, and we both turned to watch the proceedings.

This ceremonial was also very carefully planned to give it the appearance of formal reality.

A loud flourish of trumpets was sounded, and the court herald stepped forward and announced that his majesty the king had a weighty communication to make at once.

Every one of the privy councilors present went forward and stood in a group about the throne—and among them was Baron Heckscher and five or six of the men who had been associated as leaders in the scheme.

To them the pseudo king made many bows, and choosing Baron Heckscher as his mouthpiece, delivered by him a message to the rest.

Then the trumpets blared again, and the supposed king, standing up laid aside the outer Chinese robe he wore and stood revealed in the ordinary court dress of the king himself; but he remained masked, of course.

He next handed a paper to the baron, who handed it to one of the heralds; and the latter, who had been properly coached as to its contents, read it out in a loud, ringing voice to all the people assembled.

This was the royal proclamation that his majesty had resolved to abdicate, and that he had nominated the Countess Minna von Gramberg, the nearest heir, as his successor, and called upon the people to support her.

At this juncture I made my way to where Minna was standing in her hooded domino by Von Krugen, and took my place beside her. She was trembling violently, and I whispered a word or two of encouragement.

"You had better get ready to unmask and throw aside the domino," I said, and her reply was drowned in the ringing cheers of the crowd.

There was no mistaking the heartiness which greeted the news of the abdication; but the question for us was whether there would be the same cheering when it was found that Minna herself was present to accept the honor thus offered her.

At first those people who were not in the secret had been altogether unable to grasp the meaning of the proceedings; but those in the plot soon led the

way, and as they scattered thickly all about the room, they spread the news quickly, and by assuming to take the whole thing as genuine, induced the rest to indorse an event they desired only too keenly.

Then followed the act of abdication.

The crown was brought by a page to the king, and he took it and placed it on his head.

This was followed by a moment of silence.

The trumpets blared out again, and the herald announced that his majesty would lay aside the crown in accordance with the proclamation, and as a sign that he renounced it forever in favor of his successor.

The action was watched in deep, dead silence; but no sooner had it been completed than the chorusing crowd, who had been carefully coached, broke out into loud and vociferous cries and shouts of "Long Live Queen Minna!"

"Now Minna," I whispered anxiously, for she seemed too anxious to make the slightest attempt to prepare. "In another moment I must lead you forward."

As the cries died away, the man on the throne, now uncrowned, moved aside, and with a bow to those round him, walked quickly away out of the hall.

There was another blare of trumpets, and a fresh call for the queen.

"Come, Minna; you must come," I said firmly; and I myself unmasked, drawing the attention of many in the room upon me by this act.

But the girl at my side made no movement. She had ceased to tremble, however, as I found when she put her hand on my arm.

"Everything will be ruined, Minna, if you do not come," I said, and in my excitement I touched her domino, as if to draw it away.

A low, soft laugh was the answer I got.

I looked up in the deepest astonishment and dismay. I began to fear I knew not what.

A glance at the secret mark on the domino told me there was no mistake. The little red cross on the shoulder next me was distinctly visible.

But an instant later I knew what it all meant.

The mask was slipped off, but instead of Minna, the face of Clara Weylin met mine, with a look of exasperating mockery in the insolent, triumphant eyes.

For the moment I was like a man bereft of his senses.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A GAME OF CARDS.

A MERE game, played to idle the moments away,
Yet there may be a lesson to learn from the play;
For life is a game where finesse is not barred,
And it's well to know just how to handle each card.

IN PERILOUS WAYS.*

BY WILLIAM W. RUSS.

The story of a knight errant's peculiar mission—Exciting experiences of war time in Mexico—
Fighting against heavy odds with friends at times indistinguishable from foes.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

After a few years of roving Maxwell Harvey, who tells the story, finds himself in El Paso, where chance brings him the acquaintance of Philip Melrose, a man from New York City well on in years. Having reason to know Harvey as a fellow possessed of courage and determination, Melrose commissions him in a peculiar service—nothing less than the kidnapping of his niece from her stepfather in the city of Mexico. She is the daughter of Melrose's brother, now dead, who married a Mexican during his consulship; the girl has spent much of her time in the East at school under her uncle's care, and now, knowing that her stepfather is trying to gain possession of her fortune, the old gentleman seeks aid in getting her away entirely from her present environment.

Taking for his companion Theodore Martin, a young doctor out of patients, Harvey sets out for the capital of Mexico, which he reaches after many vicissitudes by the way, for it is a time of civil war. He discovers the house of Don Carlos, where the girl is kept under surveillance, and then, in the hope of learning something useful in regard to it and its master, he makes himself at home in a wine shop near by, seeking to gain a friendly footing with its frequenters by playing cards with a party of them. After playing a short time, he is accused by one of the men of cheating, gets the better of him in a fight, and escapes. Followed, he takes refuge in the house of Don Carlos, where he manages to meet Señora Teresa. While talking they are interrupted, and to escape Harvey jumps from a second story window, landing on a monk.

Again finding himself followed, he hides in a doorway, and by so doing puts his pursuers on another man's track. The latter is soon attacked and Harvey, going to his rescue, finds him to be Francisco Miranda, a person of some note.

With Martin's aid, Harvey rescues Señorita Teresa, who is being taken to a convent, but while escorting her to La Puebla they get separated and Harvey is taken prisoner by soldiers under Fray Ignominus and escorted in chains to Chapultepec.

Condemned, Harvey escapes the sentence of death by the sudden breaking up of the military court, and is led away with other prisoners. Evading the vigilance of the guard, he escapes to another room, where he is murderously attacked by Fray Ignominus. The monk is thrown senseless to the ground, and Harvey makes his escape disguised in the black cowl.

Reaching the city on foot, Harvey calls upon his bankers and, after much difficulty, secures some money. Later he is met by Pedro, the faithful servant, who leads him to a hiding place, delivering to him a letter from Melrose, which tells Harvey of the capture of Melrose by bandits and begs for aid. Harvey journeys to Texcoco and from there makes his way to the mountain lair of the bandit chief, where he is received with apparent hospitality but is locked in his room at night.

CHAPTER XVII.—A MATTER OF COURAGE.

I HAD noticed that a faint light came into the room from the hole in the roof, which had been left to serve as a chimney. I took the bench, placed the stool on it, and then, cautiously climbing upon my improvised scaffolding, examined carefully the stones about the opening.

*This story began in the November issue of THE ARGOSY. The four back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 40 cents.

Most of them were loose, as I had thought they might be, for the mud in which they had been laid had been washed from the joints. I found it was possible to move some of them, and so began at the top, reaching up and taking them down one at a time, or pushing them out upon the roof.

I worked swiftly and silently; but with each stone I took down into the room it was necessary for me to climb from the stool and bench, and this took time. I bruised my hands, but I did not mind that. I succeeded in enlarging the opening so that I could put my head through it, but it was not large enough to admit my body. The other stones seemed to be firm; and tug and pull as I would I could not start them.

By examination I found that one of them extended well down into the room, and taking my knife I dug the dirt from between it and the adjoining stones, and at last succeeded in getting it loose. It was heavy, but I managed to lower it to the floor. I now thought it would be possible for me to draw myself up on to the roof.

It was a tight squeeze, and at one time I thought I was stuck fast in the hole. I gave a sigh of relief when I was through, and sat down to regain my breath. As I had accomplished so much successfully, I seemed to gain courage to proceed.

After first examining my pistols to see that they were all right, I crept to the edge of the roof of the house and looked over. Two horses stood at the door, but there was no one in sight. By placing my foot on the window ledge of the room below I was able to reach the ground without making much noise.

I had almost expected to find some one on the watch outside, but no doubt the bandits felt themselves secure, and deemed such precautions unnecessary. I crept along and listened at the door. It yielded a little, and realizing that I must act promptly if I expected to succeed I gave the door a sudden push and in an instant more had the bandits covered with my revolvers.

It was a complete surprise. Not only were the men taken off their guard, but so unlooked for was such a thing that there had been no time to think of resistance, and they obeyed me without a word.

"The first man who moves dies," I cried savagely. "You are my prisoners."

I did not think of it at the time, but my face and clothes were covered with soot, and I must have presented a very fierce aspect—especially so in the dim light of the room. The men cowered before me without a show of resistance. There were five of them, all rough looking fellows, well armed, their belts filled with pistols and knives.

A sixth man sat a little apart from them; and I saw at once by his appearance that he was not one of the gang, but evidently was the prisoner whose ransom had been under discussion. He stared at me with wide open eyes, and I fancied that a smile seemed to play for the moment about his lips.

I looked for Mr. Melrose, but he was not there. I had even counted somewhat on his assistance. I could hold the men at bay, but it would be another matter to secure them alone, and unassisted.

There seemed to be only one thing for me to do; I must press the unarmed man into service. If my surmises concerning him were correct—that he was held a prisoner—this might not be hard to do. But I did not trust him without first feeling pretty sure of my man.

Keeping my station at the door, and acting deliberately, my eyes fixed on the scoundrels before me, I ordered him to disarm and secure the prisoners, taking them in turn, first relieving them of their weapons, and then binding their arms behind them. He appeared not to object to doing this—in truth he went at the work with a spirit of willingness I had not expected.

The chagrin and discomfiture of the bandits can be better imagined than described when it began to dawn slowly upon their minds that I had taken them single handed. Montalveo especially was furious, as I could see. Still, not one of them dared to move.

I had told them that the first one who offered resistance would be shot, and they had every reason to believe that I would carry out my threat. They had cast nervous glances about them, and now and then one would mutter something under his breath; but a glance or a word from me was sufficient to quiet them, and after they were bound there was nothing for them to do but to submit to my terms.

My confederate had been equal to the task imposed upon him. When he stepped before the light in front of me, I knew from his dress and appearance, as well as from his bearing, that he was a Mexican or Spaniard of the better class. He certainly was a gentleman, and a man of courage.

He carried out his part of the program with a readiness which was very gratifying to me. As I caught his eye, I was conscious of a look of triumph in it, if not of vindictiveness; for his face showed a sternness which plainly told that the bandits had nothing to hope for from him.

"Now, señor," I said, addressing him, when I saw that all were secured, "I have a little matter of business with these fellows which I have to settle; but first may I ask to whom it is that I am indebted for this assistance, and how came you here?"

"My name is Antonio Cortinia," he replied, first casting a glance to see that the bandits were secure. "I was taken by these outlaws near Cholula, while on the road from the capital to La Puebla. I am held for a ransom, which was to be paid tomorrow morning; but I'd sooner lose an arm than see them get a real of my money."

"As you have done me a good turn, I hope I may reciprocate," I replied. "And if there is a way to beat these selfconstituted tax gatherers, we will find it; and that, too, I trust, without you losing an arm or suffering any other bodily harm."

"I am at your command," he said, "but I would like to know what is to be done with these fellows. They are outlaws."

"We will see what kind of a treaty we can make with them," I answered. "But first see that you are armed, and hold yourself on the defense, for we may have warm work."

He did as I directed, selecting two pistols from those he had taken from the bandits, and placing the other weapons handy for use.

"Señor," said the chief, addressing me, "you have us in your power. It was a surprise. I assure you that we are willing to release Don Cortinia. He is at liberty to go. I pledge my word that he may go in safety."

"But he is not going just now," I replied. "And when he does go I shall see to it that it is safe for him to go. But first, you have another person in your custody, Señor Philip Melrose, an old man, gray headed, and an American."

"No, señor," protested the bandit with the greatest sincerity, "no American. You can see for yourself that he is not here."

I looked at the bandit chief sharply. Not a muscle of his face moved. He looked me squarely in the eye, with so honest an expression of countenance, that had I not known the characteristics of his race I would have been forced, in spite of myself, to believe that he was telling me the truth.

"Well, then," I replied coolly, "we might as well rid the country of the whole rascally lot of you, and the quicker it is done, and we are off, the better."

"We are in your power," he replied with resignation.

"And you have my terms," I said. "Accept them or the alternative, as you choose."

"I can die, señor," he replied.

I had him covered with my revolver, and my finger pressed the trigger. I thought that he quavered a little, but I could not see that his countenance changed. The rest of the band glanced nervously first at me, and then at him.

It required only a slight pressure of my finger to send the man's soul into eternity, and it would have been so easily done. It was an awful moment that I waited, but he did not waver.

"What have you to say?" I demanded, resolved to give him one more chance.

"If I find your man?" he replied. "We know the roads, the passes, every trail. Ours is not the only party that lives in these mountains."

"It is all I want. Bring him here, safely, within an hour, and you shall be released, and your men with you."

"The time is too short!" he cried. "We will have to go miles. The country is rough. It is night. Give us a day—until tomorrow?"

I hesitated. Possibly I was demanding too much. I was about to grant longer time, but a look from the Spaniard, who stood back of the chief, gave me to understand that an hour was sufficient time.

"I will wait an hour," I said. "I grant you your life on this condition, that Señor Melrose is brought here within the hour. I mean it, you accept my terms, or I will shoot you."

He hesitated, pleaded for delay, but I was firm. I gave him until I should count ten to decide, and I counted slowly the time.

"We will accept your terms," he said.

It was a relief to me. A moment more, and I would have sent a bullet through his heart.

"Release us," he continued, "and I give you my word that we will bring you the American."

"I will release one of your men," I said, "and he can depart with orders from you. If he is not back within the time I have stated, and with the señor, then you will be shot. Are the terms not fair? Do you agree to them?"

"I must go myself, señor."

"No, you stay here."

"But if the señor cannot be found?"

"You die, as I said," I replied. "I make my own terms. Remember, too, this place is strong, and if there is any treachery, first you and your men who are my prisoners will be shot."

"But what guaranty have we that you will keep your promise, and set us free when we have fulfilled our part of the agreement?"

"None whatever, only my word," I replied. "You are at liberty to accept or reject my terms. I have made them easy for you. A price is set upon your head, dead or alive, but I offer you your liberty, and your men will be permitted to accompany you on this one condition, that Señor Melrose, whom you hold with the expectation of receiving a ransom, is brought to me safe and well."

"Señor," said Don Cortinia, "one more condition, I am to be given my liberty."

"It is so understood," I replied.

"You are depriving us of a pretty ransom, just as terms were being made," said the bandit chief.

"Yes," I answered, "and I am denying myself the pretty price set upon your head. It is six of one and half a dozen of the other, and you may accept or not, as you please. If you do not care to avail yourself of my offer, I shall make short work of carrying my threat into execution; and, what is more, I will then set about finding the señor myself."

He tried to beg off, to persuade me to allow him to go, pleading that he was the only one who could find the Señor Melrose, but I would not hear to any such arrangement. Then it was first one man and then another whom he wished released; and when I had finally released one man, he had much to say to him, so that I began to suspect that he was delaying matters for the sake of gaining time.

And this seemed to be his plan, for very soon I heard footsteps outside; and, quick as a flash, it came to my mind that some of the band had been lurking near the house, and that I had been all too careless in guarding the door. Instantly I had thrown it open, and if I was not surprised myself, the fellow outside certainly was.

He offered not the slightest resistance, and it was a sight to behold his surprise when I brought him into the room, and he saw the bandits bound hand and foot. He proved to be the fellow I had seen at the house below, and I felt no little satisfaction at seeing him bound and placed with the rest.

At this turn of affairs, Montalveo appeared to weaken and lose hope; for he permitted his man to go, telling him to make all possible haste. After he had gone there was nothing to do but await his return, and I believe that hour was the longest hour I ever spent in my life.

I had secured the door, so as to be prepared in case of an attack, and had taken my place under the window that I might be first to hear any one approaching the house. I began to fear that I might be under the necessity of putting my threat into execution, when I heard footsteps.

My heart gave a great bound when I recognized Mr. Melrose's voice, and I would have thrown open the door at once to welcome him, but I knew that it was best to act with caution, and so I let Don Cortinia open the door, while I stood back, so as to guard against any sudden attack.

Mr. Melrose, in his joy at seeing me, I doubt not would have thrown himself upon me, but that I looked extremely fierce with two big revolvers in my hands. He must have understood the situation, and I did not explain to him that I had been doing heavy guard duty.

The bandit chief now at once demanded his release, declaring that his part of the contract had been carried out; but I had no idea of letting so dangerous an outlaw go until I thought it beyond his power to do me harm. It was now nearly daylight, and we could probably see to follow the trail; so I had the fellow who had brought Mr. Melrose fetch my horse from the stable, and also two others, there being two horses hitched at the door, as I have mentioned.

I released another one of the men. I had decided to take two of the bandits as hostages for our safety until we could get out of the country, and so informed their chief, with an intimation that if we were attacked, they would be shot.

"You play me false, you play me false!" cried Montalveo vehemently. "It is not according to our agreement."

"If we are not molested they will be sent back," I replied. "And as for their safety, and your own, it will be well for you to hold your tongue and remain where you are until they come back to release you."

With this bit of good advice, I bade him good morning, and the five of us, one of the bandits in the lead, I, myself in the rear, we took our departure.

As we passed the hovel where I had stopped the evening before, two women came out of the door. Immediately upon seeing us, and the two men we had with us, they began to scream and rain curses upon us, doubtless thinking we had killed the other men, and were taking these away as prisoners.

"Keep still, will you!" exclaimed the man in front of me. "You had better attend to your own business."

He gave them a look as if to direct their attention to the house we had left.

In a moment they had stopped their cries, retiring within the house; but after we had passed by I saw them run out and up the trail. Here was a danger I had not counted on. They would set the men in the house free, and give them an opportunity to follow us, but it could not be helped now.

I was not making war on women, and no doubt the men would have soon found a way of freeing themselves without the help of the women. I was afraid that they would take a short cut over the mountain and fire upon us in some of the narrow places. As soon as we had traveled a mile or two I let my hostages go, thinking it best not to be impeded with them.

"Why did you set the rascals free?" demanded Don Cortinia angrily.

"I gave their chief my word that they should be released."

"They should be shot—the devils—a pretty way to treat with outlaws! What rights have they?"

"They have a right to expect that I would keep my word."

"What is your word with a bandit? Had you put the knife to the whole lot, it would have served them as they deserved. They would have done the same by you, had they had the opportunity. Oh, you're an American—you do not know them!"

"You forget," I replied coolly, though I was somewhat incensed at being called to account in this way for what I had done, "that I treated with them, and that they had carried out their part of the agreement, and I would be as honorable with them as they have been with me."

"They were in your power," he replied. "But there was no reason why you should have let those fellows keep their horses."

"I am not a horse thief."

His lip curled.

"With their horses they will follow us," he said. "The passes are known to them, and they will come in ahead of us on the trail. You can take my word for it, we have not seen the last of them."

"I have my life at stake, as well as you have yours," I replied impulsively. "If we are fired upon from ambush, it will be me that they will first pick off. But having met me once, I do not think they will care to meet me again."

"Come, come, for God's sake," cried Mr. Melrose, "let us get away from here. I have no relish for having another sight of them."

"Put spurs to your horse, then," I replied. "I will keep rear guard."

They did as I directed, Don Cortinia taking the lead. It was a hard, reckless ride, over a mountain trail, for we did not spare our horses. The Spaniard was a superb horseman, but Mr. Melrose, I think, clung to his saddle for his life and in momentary fear of being pitched over his horse's head. At times I caught my breath, fearing that he would be thrown. Fortunately, he had a good horse and one used to mountain travel, or he might have met with disaster.

As for myself, I had that reckless feeling, which at times will come to some men, rendering them senseless to danger and making them oblivious to fear of any kind. In truth, I was in just that frame of mind which would have led me to seek danger, rather than avoid it. We pushed on in this way until we reached the national road, and then drew rein, feeling that we were out of immediate danger.

"You received my note?" asked Mr. Melrose, as I rode along by his side. It was the first time we had had opportunity for speaking together.

"Fortunately I did," I replied.

"You were at La Puebla, then?"

"No, I was at the capital, but my man brought it to me."

"Ah, and you did not call upon Messrs. Smith & Rivera?"

"I thought it best not to do so," I replied. "Our relations, to say the least, have not always been of the pleasantest. I was under the necessity of

drawing on him for five hundred pesetas just before I received the note. This he paid me under protest, only after I had made peremptory demands for the money. I shall furnish you with an account of my expenditures."

"Tut, tut, man, I do not ask it. You drew five hundred pesetas. There was five thousand subject to your order."

"I doubt if I could have secured a real more," I said.

"Strange," he muttered to himself. I saw that he was worried, but he said nothing more about the money.

"I am under lasting obligations to you, Mr. Harvey," he said, after a while. "I shall see that you are well rewarded. But my niece, Teresa? I heard of her being kidnapped on the Paseo. I was certain you had 'a hand in that business, and naturally concluded that you would go to La Puebla. I had not been staying in the city for a day or two, and was on the road to follow you when I was taken by the bandits. Ah, had you known them better, you would never have attempted what you have done."

"That may be, Mr. Melrose," I replied, "but it was not so difficult an undertaking as one might suppose. It was simply a matter of courage or audacity," I explained. "I was well armed, and I took the fellows off their guard, and they had not sense enough to recover from their surprise in time to make any resistance. Do you not remember how our army entered the City of Mexico a few years ago, after defeating the Mexicans in engagement after engagement? Success was due to audacity, the very boldness of the undertaking.

"Years ago, Cortez, with an insignificant army, a mere handful of adventurers, defeated the hordes of the Tlascalans not very far from where we are now. In one battle there were opposed to him nearly a hundred thousand men, and at another time one hundred and fifty thousand men. In the first battle it is said that he lost not a man, and in the second engagement the loss was almost insignificant, and thousands of the Tlascalans were slain.

"I have done nothing but what any bandit or robber might have accomplished, had he a mind to undertake the business. I cannot even lay my success to any shrewdness and skill on my part, for I blundered in among them, and fortune favored me. The fellows were cowards, or they would have made some resistance. As I say, it was a matter of courage."

"Your courage must be of the extraordinary kind, then," said Mr. Melrose, looking me over from head to foot, as if to make sure that I was myself and not some one else.

"No, I do not think it is," I replied. "I am fearless of danger, because familiarity with it has led me to view it with contempt. I deserve no credit for courage."

"Most certainly you do!" he exclaimed. "It takes nerve and resolution. You set about doing a thing, and your will carries you through. You succeed where others would fail."

"I would accomplish nothing if I set about doing a thing in a half hearted way," I replied. "You will remember when the brave General Pillows was sent to storm Chapultepec, our soldiers quickly carried the outer works, climbing over fortification after fortification; and with such impetus did they

press on, that the Mexicans were unable to find time to fire their guns, or to explode the mines which had been prepared.

"Before they were aware of it, our flag was set above the castle. It is only necessary to do—to do something as if one meant business. The Mexicans are a slow race, and that is one of their chief faults."

"You have done nobly," replied Mr. Melrose. "You have the capacity of a general, and only lack the opportunity to distinguish yourself."

CHAPTER XVIII.—AN AFFAIR BY THE WAY.

I DO not think that I am often given to appearing egotistical, for I have always had the reputation of being somewhat reserved and unobtrusive in my speech. I am rather more of a man of action than of words. But naturally, at some times my tongue moves with more freedom than at others, and then I am disposed to run on very much as I did on the present occasion.

It was not probable, however, that Mr. Melrose meant to check me, or intended to insinuate that I was saying too much regarding myself and playing the braggart, for he had always expressed his admiration for my ability and knew that I was generally modest in speaking of myself. Neither was I offended at what he said, but upon being called to myself, I very quickly lapsed into silence.

As it happened, the road was good at this point, and we urged our horses forward. We did not draw rein for a mile or two, and then only because the descent became steep. Mr. Melrose was again at my side, and though quite out of breath from the exertion of keeping in the saddle, would ask me numerous questions, not only regarding his niece, but also concerning my own misadventures. I endeavored to answer his questions as modestly as possible, giving him a brief account of my imprisonment and escape, and my reasons for not following out his instructions and entering into negotiations with the bandits.

Don Cortinia gave a rather exaggerated account of the capture of the outlaws, in which he gave me more credit for bravery than I deserved, and himself considerable glory, which I was certainly willing he should have.

"And my niece, Teresa Melrose!" exclaimed Mr. Melrose suddenly. "You have told me scarcely anything about her."

This was indeed true; though it was not because I had forgotten her, for she had been constantly in my mind from the time when I first met her. Nor was I likely to forget her. But for some reason—perhaps because I was so much at a loss to account for her leaving me, and not anxious to attempt explanations I knew not how to make—I had said little about her.

Then, too, there are affairs which seem to be of such a personal nature—as, for instance, in this case having received a rebuff from the young lady—that one hesitates to speak about them. But now, in answer to his inquiry, I related most of what had occurred, omitting nothing that I thought would be of importance, even repeating to him our conversation. I also told him the part the monk, Fray Ignominious, had played; especially how he had followed my footsteps and at last succeeded in securing my arrest and imprisonment.

I said nothing about Don Luis, nor did I mention meeting him, as I did not like to speak of one who seemed to be my rival. Besides, the differences which had arisen between us seemed to be almost of a personal nature.

"And you say that you were arrested at La Puebla, and then brought back?" he asked. "So this is how it came about that you were at the capital?"

"It is."

"And before you were arrested, you learned that Teresa had left the hotel?"

"I was so informed by my man Martin," I replied. "I had no reason to doubt the truth of what he told me."

"You think this man Martin you speak of is trustworthy?"

"Certainly I do," I answered. "I have implicit confidence in him."

"It is not likely, then, that he had anything to do with your being arrested, or that he induced Teresa to go away?"

"I do not think so," I replied. "I am convinced that he knew nothing of my arrest until after it had been made."

"Then you believe that it was the monk, Fray Ignominious, who induced her to go away?"

"I do, and that he knew where she went," I said. "He followed us to La Puebla, and I learned afterwards from his own lips that he was the person who informed on me, and had me arrested."

"She left no word?"

"None that I know of. I should have thought, though, she would not have gone as she did."

"There are many religious houses in the city, and it is possible that she may have gone to one of these," he suggested. "But for that matter, her experience in the past, and the objections she has always made to entering a convent, is against such a supposition. We do not know the circumstances which led to her leaving the hotel; and as for their nunneries and convents, I am prejudiced against them."

"I do not say that she did not act wisely," I replied. "As things turned out—I being arrested—it was perhaps best that she did not remain at the hotel."

"Yes, yes, because we cannot tell what would have occurred. She may be with friends, and well cared for. But the monk, Fray Ignominious, he is dead, you say?"

"I think there can be no question but what he is dead," I answered.

"It is the hand of God! And God be praised!" exclaimed Mr. Melrose.

I could have said amen to this. I, in particular, had reason to be thankful for Fray Ignominious' death.

"But there are others who will oppose us," he said. "Did it ever happen that you met one Don Luis Robolo? I have heard his name mentioned in connection with that of my niece."

I was about to say that I had met him, when he continued:

"It is not strange she should have admirers, but he is a——"

I think he was about to say "Spaniard," but looking up, he saw Don Cor-

tinia. He had got some distance ahead of us while we were talking, had drawn rein, and was waiting for us somewhat impatiently.

"If we proceed in this leisurely fashion," he said, "we may expect to be overtaken. Or, do you want to give those rascals another chance at us?" he asked, turning to me.

"The rascals have had their chance," I replied. "And as for being in a hurry, we will reach La Puebla in good time."

"We will be lucky if we reach there at all," he retorted. "The more I think of it, the more I am satisfied that we made a great mistake in leaving them to follow us. The cutthroats!—they are a bad lot. Did you mark the cunning in their chief's eye? I would have——"

He stopped suddenly. Something across the valley had attracted his attention. I looked up just in time to see a horseman disappear over the ridge, and very soon two others followed him. They were Mexicans, and were armed; but further than that I could not tell. Their appearance caused Don Cortinia some uneasiness.

"Bandits!" he muttered. "What did I tell you? We are not yet out of the woods."

I endeavored to laugh at the idea that the men were bandits, for I saw that what he said had caused Mr. Melrose much alarm; and, in truth, I did not believe that we would be attacked. We were well armed, and could make a good fight. It was probable that the men we saw were herders, and came from the hacienda; or they might be travelers like ourselves.

But we pushed ahead a little faster than we had been doing. As we drew up our horses again, I noticed that Mr. Melrose was looking pale and tired, seemingly keeping his seat in the saddle with difficulty.

"This will not do for you to travel without breakfast," I said, turning to him. "You are ill already."

"I have not been well," he replied, "but do not concern yourself on my account. We will keep on. I am anxious to reach La Puebla as soon as possible."

"It may be that Señor Harvey has been in the habit of taking his breakfast with his dinner," suggested Don Cortinia, with a faint smile. "I can say for myself that for some time I have felt the need of a cup of coffee."

"And we will have it," I replied, "for, if I am not mistaken, there is a house ahead of us on the road, and we will see what we can get to eat. But I will say that I have of late been accustomed to eat when circumstances make it convenient for me to do so."

"But we will not adopt your custom," said the Spaniard, "unless circumstances necessitate. It is an American custom I don't like. As to the house you speak of, it is kept by a greaser, and it is well we are hungry if we are to eat breakfast there, for I can promise you that they do not set a *table d'hôte*, nor are meals served 'en cours.'"

"We will take what we can get, and be thankful for it," said Mr. Melrose. "A cup of coffee will be better than nothing. It will warm us up."

Under the excitement caused by the mental strain I had been subject to, through the rapid changing of events, I had not noticed the cold, nor had I

thought before of eating. The sun was now well up, the morning advanced, and it was no longer chilly.

We had been descending from the high elevation of the mountains all the time, and it is wonderful what a change elevation will effect in temperature. But my companions were older than I, their blood was not so warm, nor were they used to roughing it as I had been doing for the last two years. Then, too, living several months in the high altitude of the City of Mexico had served to acclimate me.

A dog snarled at us as we rode up to the house; a shiftless, ill clad, bare-footed fellow came to the door, stared at us vacantly, and then called to an Indian boy, who stretched himself, and got up lazily from a pile of straw in a shed at one end of the house. We dismounted, giving our horses to the peon as he came to take them, and went into the house.

The house was but a hovel, with the ground for a floor. One or two small windows admitted a little light. The room smelt abominably of odors which were beyond my power of analyzing, except to say that they were most vile.

It would seem that the fire—what little was needed for cooking—was built anywhere on the floor, as was most convenient, and the smoke allowed to escape as best it might through door or windows. At one end of the room there was a bundle of magurie fibers, which were used as a bed. There was also a rude table, and near the walls were benches or stools. These things, with a few cooking utensils, constituted about all the furniture of the room.

A woman, as frowsy as the man, was seated on the ground, engaged in preparing tortillas, a task, as it seemed to me, which was the universal occupation of Mexican women. She looked up as we entered, but did not rise.

The dog still barked at our heels, and the man gave him a kick which sent him howling out of the door, and then offered us seats. Mr. Melrose sank into the nearest one, and I waited for the Spaniard. He had turned to the man.

"We want some coffee," he explained, "as good as you can make, and also something to eat."

"Yes, señor," he replied, courteously enough, "we will give you the best we have."

The best they had, with the lower classes of Mexicans, was bad enough, I knew. It mattered not about the war, for it affected them very little. They never had anything. The property and wealth of the nation belonged to the church, and the few wealthy families.

Yet poverty to those who knew nothing better, who had no higher ambition than merely to exist, was not intolerable. It was their inheritance; and generations of life under the same conditions had inured them to it. And this, too, in a land of wonderful resources, where it would seem that every one might have plenty and abundance.

But the Mexicans are indolent, content to have nothing; and it was likely that it would be a thankless undertaking for the philanthropist who would attempt to show them how they might better their condition. But to one of such a fine and sensitive nature as Mr. Melrose possessed, the surroundings were unbearable.

I saw him look about him with disgust, and I doubt not, had he been in better health and spirits, he would have preached to our host a sermon on shiftlessness. As for Don Cortinia, long familiarity with the conditions of the people had made him unmindful of their poverty, and he probably looked upon it as inevitable. He took a seat at the table, and I sat down near him, but facing the door.

"If we are fortunate enough to reach La Puebla tonight, I think we will appreciate being at a good hotel," observed Mr. Melrose.

"We will not reach La Puebla tonight," replied Don Cortinia.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Not reach La Puebla?"

"No, for we have a good day's ride before we reach Tlaxcala. And from Tlaxcala to La Puebla it is fully ten miles, if not more. No, we will lay over at Tlaxcala."

"I guess that we will have to," I said. "But I can say that this is an infernally slow country."

"Not so slow sometimes," replied the Spaniard, with a scornful smile.

The coffee was brought to us black, but not so bad as we might have expected to find; and also some of the tortillas which we had seen the woman making. She went out after she had finished baking them; but the man stayed to wait upon us. I was hungry, and paid little attention to what was going on.

The Spaniard was quite himself and appeared to be as much at home as if he had been at his own table. He was in a talkative mood, and he was giving Mr. Melrose an account of the war and troubles which led to it. His listener, however, had assumed an indifferent attitude, and seemed only half conscious of what was being told to him.

"This war is being fought," Don Cortinia was saying, "as revolutions have been fought in Mexico before. It involves only a few, comparatively speaking. In a month, or a year, it will be over. Possibly there is more in this war than is usual with revolutions in Mexico, for it is not altogether a one man affair, in which some one aspires to being president, but grave issues are at stake.

"But the people, strange to say, care little which side wins. They have no definite ideas as to their political and religious rights. Mexico is not a country which should be a republic. An emperor, or a king—a man with broad conservative ideas—would be better than the rule of politicians. It may come to this——"

He stopped abruptly, as if from inattention of his listeners, but I knew in a moment something was wrong. Intuitively I looked up, and as I did so, I distinctly saw the shadow of a man fall across the doorway. My attention was also directed toward our host. He had come around to the side of the table, and stood directly back of the Spaniard.

The woman, too, came in at that moment; but it was not her shadow that I had seen across the threshold. But I did see an evil light in her eyes, and that she was holding something concealed beneath her reboza. The Spaniard must have noticed it too, for, quick as a flash, he sprang forward and wrenched the knife from her hand, hurling her from him, but before he could turn to defend himself the man was upon him, furious with rage.

"Villain!" I exclaimed, making a bound for the Mexican, and clutching at his throat. He struggled to get away from me, but I bore him down to the ground. Fortunate it was for me that we fell, for as we went down together a bullet whizzed over my head, and there were shouts and cries from outside the house.

I fell upon the Mexican, and he was partially stunned by the fall. As I recovered myself the room seemed to grow dark. I was conscious that Mr. Melrose had fallen back against the wall, and I remember afterwards having seen the Spaniards crouched behind the table.

He was leaning over it, his revolver drawn—he was holding it with both hands—and then he fired. Something struck me on the head, and half blinded and mad with pain, I drew my revolvers and began firing at the doorway.

I could see men crowding in—fierce, savage looking faces—and heard their yells and curses, and saw the flash of their pistols. The room was blue with smoke, and I could see no one distinctly, only forms, but I fired shot after shot until I had emptied my revolvers, and then, seeming to despair of ever getting out of the place alive, I threw myself upon the crowd, and fought madly. But there were too many. I was suffocating—I could not get my breath. I stumbled over the body of a man, there was a flash before my eyes and I remembered nothing more.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE EMBARRASSING PREDICAMENT OF MR. T. B. GALE.

BY HADDON GORDON.

A gentleman, in whom exceeding bashfulness and great bravery are evenly pitted against each other, wins a wife through ingenuity.

MR. T. B. GALE. How shall I describe him, beyond saying he was small, very small? But you must not think he was of little importance to the community. He was a man of spirit, a human specimen of that insect whose name is suggested by his middle initial.

His honey he saved for the presence of the fair ones, and wonderful was his command over the language known as complimentary. The goddesses of ancient Greece and the famous beauties of the past lived (if we are to believe Mr. T. B. Gale) and walked among the groves of Kent.

Dianas there were several. Venus had any number of duplicates, and once he likened the dowager matron of the house of Smith to Juno; but then, he held that estimable lady decidedly in awe—I might suggest, was afraid of her, if that were possible for so gallant a man.

He was, indeed, deservedly popular with the young ladies. It was so pleasant to have such a man around, to tell you all the gossip and put you in good humor with yourself and with the rest of the world by compliments, and who with it all was amusing.

It was almost as good as having a pet dog in the house, for he did not

"spoil it all" by demanding the hand that petted him, which some men unaccountably have a way of doing.

His sting (and Mr. T. B. Gale could be very severe when he was aroused) he reserved entirely for men. "For," said this gallant gentleman, "no matter what a young lady may say, no matter what she may do, or how it affects your honor all that you can do as a gentleman, sir, is to bow and say: 'Madame, as a lady, you have a right to use the weapons which the Creator has seen fit to give you, but my manhood forbids me to reply or to use arms against so fair an opponent.'"

"How stupid!" the young lady would retort with scorn.

"As to men, sir," he would continue with marked emphasis, "that is far different;" and then he would stop, draw himself up, and some have suggested you could see a flash in his eye.

It was indeed a far different affair, as was shown by his celebrated encounter with Mr. James McNab, the road supervisor, over the question of bettering the condition of the Quaker Neck Road.

Mr. McNab, who was as canny a Scotchman as ever lived, stood on the pavement, while his adversary held his position at the head of his porch steps. The Scotchman was slow and to the point.

His opponent, feeling his superior position, hurled back his answers with indignant scorn, while Miss Matilda, his spinster sister, tried to restrain her fiery brother, but only added fuel to the flames. The hot blood of the Highlander soon stirred in the doughty Scot, and the word was passed which means—well, that you must do something desperate.

"Wait, sir; wait, sir. I will make you retract, sir," shouted the little gentleman, and he rushed into the house. The next instant he reappeared with a great flint lock horse pistol in one hand and an old cavalry saber, which had seen the war of 1812, trailing behind.

Miss Matilda screamed and threw herself upon his neck, begging him to be calm (which was placing Mr. T. B. Gale at a decided disadvantage), while the canny Scotchman down below slowly drawled out, "Do not be afraid, ma'm, he'll not hurt anybody."

But if we are to believe Mr. T. B. Gale, his popularity with the fair ones began almost as early as Macaulay's memory of his own existence.

"Mr. Gale," said a young lady one day, as they sat on a shady porch, watching the boats on the Chester, "what do your initials stand for?"

"Nothing, Miss Jones, nothing; only T. B., that is all."

"Only T. B.? Why, how funny!"

"Not at all, Miss Jones, not at all. You see, when the time came for me to be christened, my saintly mother was at a loss for a name. I was such a beautiful baby—the prettiest in the county, I have been told—that she could find no name that would do me justice.

"She went through all the names in the Bible, but none of them were to her taste. Then she tried the back of the dictionary, but whenever she found a pretty name the meaning was horrid.

"So she finally decided not to name me at all, but to wait until I grew to manhood, when, with her help, I could choose a suitable name."

"But why T. B.?"

"You see, though greatly admiring the wisdom of my mother, which is hereditary in my family, I found, when I became old enough to consider such matters, that my name was like a jug without a handle, which, though it might contain the very best brandy, put a temperance argument in the way of obtaining it. 'Gale' alone would not do.

"So I followed my mother's example and made a tour of the alphabet, picking out the letters I most admired, and leaving the choice of my name until some other time. And can you find a letter more stately than 'T,' so typical of an unright character? or 'B,' so comfortable looking, representing solid worth? Taken with 'Gale,' suggestive of a breezy and airy humor, you will see I have made a charming combination."

Decidedly, Mr. T. B. Gale was a lady's man. Yet, strange as it may seem, he had never been known to ask a young lady for her hand. The courage of the stout little gentleman seemed inevitably to fail him whenever the momentous moment came, though the campaign was always carried on with the utmost gallantry.

This was considered as rather unfortunate by several of the Dianas to whom I have referred, because Mr. T. B. Gale was a man of some property, owning quite a number of fertile farms and slaves in the lower part of Kent, besides the family mansion on Water Street, where he resided with his sister.

This town residence, as he called it, was quite a commodious old brick house, with a wide porch in front facing the street, and another one in the rear overlooking an old garden, and the beautiful Chester River. A little way up the stream could be seen the bridge running to the Queen Anne shore, and forming the promenade and trysting place of all the young people in the town—an extremely dangerous place, I have been informed, for young men who wished to remain in the state of single blessedness.

In fact, the old mansion was one of the pleasantest houses in Chestertown, and that is saying a good deal, as everybody knows. For the old county seat of Kent had long been the home of many rich and well to do families, and had been the pride of the eastern shore, ever since the day when Claiborne and his merry men held high carnival on Kent Island, in defiance of My Lord Baltimore and his popish legions in their stronghold at Saint Mary's. Since that day she had been the rival of that town across the bay, which is named after the popish lord.

Defeated in this struggle, she had settled down into the county seat of the rich and populous county of Kent, content to lead a peaceful and prosperous existence, and to be the first town on the eastern shore.

Now, it is a well known fact, established by numerous precedents, until it has become a part of the common law pertaining to courtship and marriage, that a bashful man is bound to propose sooner or later, provided that there is a young lady around and that she properly encourages so commendable a purpose.

He has many difficulties in his way, it is true, and a hard and stony road to travel; but, says a philosopher, he will never lack a gentle hand to help him over the rough places.

Such was the case with Mr. T. B. Gale. After many trials and disappointments, he was at last safely landed in the harbor of matrimony, the method of his courtship showing an ingenuity of mind and fixity of purpose that stand unparalleled among the gentry of Kent, as may be seen by those who peruse this tale to its end.

It was on the fateful bridge that he met the future Mrs. Gale. She had arrived that very afternoon by the steamer that comes puffing up the river every other day.

She came in the original package—that is, she was a maiden, not a widow—and now Miss Jones had brought her to the bridge to show her one of the prettiest sights in the town—the broad, smooth river gliding along beneath; in the distance the masts and the rigging of the vessels standing out against the sky, and the long rows of lights on the steamer; while on the Queen Anne's shore lay a peaceful farming country, fields and woods alternating, until they were lost in the distance.

Behind them was the town, set in a cluster of old trees and gardens, the lights in the houses here and there breaking through the dense shade, like so many lanterns at a *fête*. Above them shone the heavens in all their glory, moon and stars shining out of the clear blue sky, and casting their silvery beams across the gleaming waters.

Going to walk on the bridge by a visitor was like going to a ball and being introduced to society; you met everybody and were formally launched upon the society of the town. The master of ceremonies for the bridge was Mr. T. B. Gale.

Dressed in his dark coat, white marseilles vest, white trousers, and broad brimmed Panama hat, he was one of the exquisites of the place, and a leader in the fashion.

He was among the first to welcome the guest to the town, taking great pleasure in showing her the beauties of the surroundings, telling her tales of this one and that one as they passed them in their stroll along the bridge, growing eloquent and poetical under the influence of the stars, the flowing river, and the calm beauty of the scene, until the young lady almost forgot the disparity in size—for she was tall and slender, of course—so entertained was she by this master of ceremonies.

A few weeks later, I was walking down Queen Street with Miss Roland, for such was the young lady's name.

"I have just left a devoted admirer of yours, Miss Roland," said I, for we had become great friends by this time.

"Indeed!" she replied, "and pray, who may he be?"

"Mr. T. B. Gale, a very worthy gentleman, I assure you, though small."

"Small! I understood from him that he was the greatest man in Chester-town."

"He was, before a certain young lady came to town; since then he has been quite humble."

"Why, am I so terrible? Tell him I only eat big men," said she, as she ran up the steps.

"Do not forget that ride tomorrow," I called after her as she disappeared.

"I will be ready," came back her cheery answer through the doorway.

I had my office in one of those small, square, one story brick structures, which are scattered around the edge of nearly every court house green in the county towns in Maryland, and which serve as offices for lawyers and the meeting places for the political leaders on court days during election time. I was sitting in this office next morning, when I walked Mr. T. B. Gale.

"Gordon," said he, in a nervous way, "I want you to do me a favor."

"With great pleasure. What is it?"

"I hear you are going riding with Miss Roland this evening. Would you mind returning by the Radcliff Road about half past six?"

"Why, Gale, what are you up to now?" said I, somewhat surprised.

"Well, Gordon, I don't mind telling you, as you are an old friend of mine. But you know, as everybody in the town seems to know, I have been desperately in love with Miss Roland for a whole month—an age to one who is as much in love as I am. I——"

"Why do you not tell her so, then?" said I, hoping to save myself from the torrent I saw coming.

"That's just it. I don't know whether she cares for me or not. I always lose my courage when I am in her presence. Whenever you see that young lady, sir, her tall, slender form, dark brown eyes, and wavy hair, so stately and graceful, a queen among women, it seems almost a profanation for one to think of such a thing then, sir."

"I wish I could help you, my dear fellow."

"You can if you will ride down the Radcliff Road. You know the bend in the road just beyond Radcliff, where the woods are the thickest, and the old oak that stands there?"

"Well, I thought—but you must promise not to tell anybody—if Miss Roland should come riding by that oak and see me hanging there——"

"Hanging! What do you mean?"

"Oh, I do not mean hanging in real earnest. You remember the big limb that stretches over the road? Well, about four feet below that is a large knot. I thought I could rest a foot on that, put my head through the noose, and be quite comfortable until you came."

"Well, I be hanged myself, Gale, if you are not the biggest fraud in town."

"Do you think it will make any difference with her?" he asked anxiously.

"Will it? You go ahead and I will be there."

"Thank you, thank you," and the little man forgot his pomposity as he thanked me and left the office.

"Get a nice easy rope, so as not to scratch your neck," I called after him.

It was pleasant riding with so charming a young lady as Miss Roland, that calm afternoon, and I almost forgot my promise to Mr. T. B. Gale, until a mention of his name by Miss Roland recalled it to me, and we turned into the Radcliff Road.

"You will be sorry yet for the way you treat that young gentleman," I remarked.

"Will you let me know when I am to put on mourning, and when I shall let my tears begin to flow?"

"That might be sooner than you think, young lady. How do you know that you have not driven him to commit suicide already?"

"Mr. Gale commit suicide? Oh, the idea," and she laughed merrily; but the laugh died on her lips, for just at this moment we rode round the turn in the road, and saw Mr. T. B. Gale hanging by his neck from the limb, his face distorted and tongue extended, a gruesome sight.

A scream recalled me: "Merciful heavens, Mr. Gale has hanged himself," and the young lady fell back in a dead faint. Luckily I was near, and in an instant I had lifted her from the horse and laid her on the bank of the road.

I had heard a glad "whoopie" from Mr. T. B. Gale as the young lady fainted, but now a stifled exclamation and a choking sound made me look up, to see that young gentleman swinging by his neck sure enough, and making desperate efforts to grasp the tree with his hands.

In his joy at discovering what he had taken to be evidence of Miss Roland's partiality for him, he had forgotten about the knot on which his foot rested, and the next instant he was swinging into space.

To run to the tree, grasp his legs and lift him up was the work of a second. In another his hands had caught the tree, and then 't was only the question of a few moments to relieve our hero from the danger of death by strangulation.

* * * * *

In kindness to my readers, I will let them finish this tale, for they will surely guess that as a certain young lady slowly recovered we heard a whisper of "T. B." and then—in fact it was not long before I was the best man at a pretty little wedding in an old brick church down in Somerset, the home of the bride. And I know a gentleman who to this day always advises young men to marry, "even if you have to hang for it, sir."

THE LUCK OF EUSTACE BLOUNT.

BY WILLIAM M. RAINE.

A story of the War of the Roses, in which a young knight twice puts his neck in the halter, masters the two greatest men of the kingdom in parley and in battle, and thwarts a Lancastrian plot, thereby winning honor for himself and the maid he loves.

CHAPTER I.—A CHOICE OF TWO EVILS.

I LOUNGED carelessly in front of the Warwick tavern, wiping the blood from my sword. Inside they were rushing to and fro, some caring for the wounded man, some bawling for the surgeon, but all wildly excited. They might have saved themselves the trouble. He would be dead in a few minutes. Trust Eustace Blount for that. I had not waited five years to miss killing him at the last.

As I walked up and down outside, waiting for my horse, I kept a sharp lookout on those inside the inn. They were not well pleased with me, but little I cared for that, for they were but country yokels, and had not heart enough to attack me. Yet, as I say, I kept a sharp watch for treachery.

After all, they owed me thanks, the ungrateful hounds. I had given them matter for talk for a year to come. They had seen me, a stranger, fix a quarrel on the great Earl of Warwick's pet bully and crack swordsman, and after the blades were out, force him to the wall and spit him through the lungs. He was a good swordsman, but I was a better. Before we had crossed swords five minutes I had him against the wall with terror on his ashen face, and abject fear in his eyes.

I had already made up my mind to make for Scotland, where I could lie in hiding for a while. The arm of the Earl of Warwick was long, but it would have to be longer yet ere it could reach me, once I got across the border.

The trouble would be to reach the line. The times were unsettled, and I was in the very heart of the earl's district. My best plan seemed to be to push straight to the north as fast as my horse could take me, giving myself out as a king's messenger.

Unfortunately at the very moment the hostler brought out my horse a half score of horsemen wearing the Neville livery rode into the courtyard. Some one called out to them to stop me. I ran to my horse and leaped on, but before I could draw my sword they closed in on me and dragged me from my horse.

The odds were too heavy against me, so I ceased struggling at once, allowing them to bind my hands, which indeed I could not have prevented. The men poured into the inn to have a look at Tresdale. A moment later one of them came and called out that the wounded man was dead.

An hour later we remounted, turning toward Warwick Castle.

"Is the earl at the castle?" I asked of the man riding on my right.

"Yes."

"Was Tresdale a favorite?"

"No, he was a bully. We hated him."

"I mean of the earl. How will he take it?"

The man looked at me with a sudden pity. "Tresdale was a stout villain, and the earl likes daring. He will not be well pleased."

What the man said was true. The Earl of Warwick was the most ambitious man in England. He had a following greater than the king. It is said that thirty thousand people sat down daily to meat at his different manors and castles throughout England. Kings sent private ambassadors to him as well as to the English court. He had put Edward on the throne, but was watching his growing power jealously.

The kingmaker wanted to be a king in fact, though not in name. I knew he could use a bold and trusty man well, and he had none in his pay better than Eustace Blount. You see what way my hopes were drifting. I thought to give him a man for the one he had lost. If this failed me, I should shortly be stretching a rope, for the earl would have no mercy.

The gate tower of Warwick Castle is flanked with ivy covered walls, having at one extremity Guy's tower, and at the other Caesar's tower. Through the gate we went into the great court, which is bound by ramparts and turrets. The court was filled with domestics and soldiers of the great earl. We passed

through the court into the castle. The captain left me in the main hall, while he went to notify the earl.

Presently the captain returned, looking every way but at me.

"Well," I said.

"To the courtyard," he commanded.

"Is it to prison?" I asked nonchalantly.

He would not hear, affecting to be busy in talk; but I would not have it so.

"What did he say? Am I to go to prison?" I asked, a sudden suspicion running through my mind and leaving me cold.

The man turned at last. "No—if you will have it. It is not prison, but—the scaffold."

"*Mort Dieu*, man!" I cried. "I have had no trial."

The man shrugged his shoulders. "I can't help that. I have had orders."

"But I am a gentleman—a Blount. He does not know who I am."

"No—nor care. He knows you killed his master of horse, and that is enough for him," the man said sullenly.

"But I must see him—I will see him. Tell him so."

"I will not," the man cried fiercely. "You do not know the earl. I dare not go back. He has given orders."

A crowd had formed round us, noticing my excitement and pallor. I knew the man would have gone back had he dared. I tried a bribe.

"Come—a sovereign—two—three."

"I'll do it for you," cried a page. I turned to him eagerly.

"Tell him Eustace Blount, son of Sir Eustace Blount of Tremont Hall, must see him."

But the boy waited.

"Well?" I cried impatiently.

"The chink, mister. I am too old a bird to be caught with chaff."

I handed him the money, and he swaggered away amid a roar of laughter. I confess I never spent a worse five minutes than those which followed.

I was in a cold sweat of fear, though I tried to hide it. I suppose I succeeded, for when the boy came back and told the captain to take me in immediately, there was a murmur of congratulation.

They led me to the baron's room. A slip of a clerk was sitting at a desk, writing a letter. A tall man, who could be no other than the kingmaker, dictated it, moving restlessly to and fro. He paid no attention to me, but went on with the letter:

Therefore I beseech you, sire, to forbear. Her father is the most popular man in the north, and he will brook no dishonor. His interest is very large, and that whole interest will be given to the Lancastrians if a hair of his daughter's head be touched. For state reasons it must not be.

Then my interest drifted from the letter to the man. He was of giant frame, clothed in full mail, except for his gauntlets, sword, and plumed hat, which lay on a chair close at hand, as if he were just about starting on a journey. His forehead was high and broad, his face harsh and stern, his eyes keen and restless.

He looked what he was, the foremost soldier and statesman in Europe. I, who never before feared man, feared him. When he had finished he dismissed the clerk, read the letter over with a frown, and turned to me. "Well?" He looked at me with bent brow. But I remembered the captain's words, "The earl likes daring," and I faced him steadily.

"Who are you?" he asked harshly.

"Eustace Blount, my lord"

"Blount, the duelist, the gambler, the London rake?"

"Blount, the soldier and gentleman of honor."

"You sent word you would see me. What you say can avail you naught, but—what is it?"

"I am a gentleman, my lord. You will not condemn me unheard."

"Well, you have your hearing," he said coldly.

"He killed my brother five years ago. And I killed him in fair fight."

"Consequently you are going to stretch a hempen rope," he answered with a sarcastic smile.

"That is as God and the king shall please," I replied doggedly.

"God will not, and the king cannot save you, my man."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"You are a bold and audacious villain. The country will be well rid of you."

"Many are of the same opinion regarding the Earl of Warwick." Then I added significantly, "I am a good swordsman."

"Yes? There are many."

"I can do more than fight. I can think."

He looked at me scornfully. "What has that to do with it. Speak out, man."

"We are coming on troublous times. A good sword may be of use to you. There is a vacancy in your household. Put me in Tresdale's place."

"Put you in Tresdale's place?" He stared at me as if he could not understand my audacity. "I'll put you where Tresdale now is." Then he roared with laughter. "By my faith, man, but you can joke. You had better kill me and ask the king to make you Earl of Warwick."

But I knew I had struck the right key, and I harped on.

"I am a desperate man and dare anything. No man can say I have ever given faith and broken it."

His eyes fell by chance on the letter he had just written, and he gave a start. He looked sternly at me for a moment, as if judging me; then fell a thinking. Yes, I had struck the right note. For years I had lived by my wits. There are those who affect to look down on such a livelihood, but it had brought me one thing that stood me in good stead now—the ability to form judgments truly and quickly.

Instinctively I knew that my fate was connected with the letter, and that the great man was considering a plan which incidentally involved my life. Another thing I had learned at the gaming table; and that was when to keep my peace. This was one of the times.

"You will go," he said, "to the north, where you will make friends with

certain gentlemen well affected to the Lancastrian cause. You will call yourself there a partisan of the Red Rose, and will gain their confidence. After that we shall see."

My heart fell. He would make a common spy of me. I could not do it. Then my anger rose at him. "You have no right to ask it of me. It is not a gentleman's work, and I will not do it," I cried hotly.

He looked amused. "So you prefer being hanged?" I did not answer.

He looked at me long and earnestly. When at last he spoke his words were slow and impressive, and he never lifted his eyes from mine.

"Listen. I will offer you a task honorable but perilous. If you succeed it is exile, and if you fail, certain death, for I will not save you. You act on your own responsibility, and I will not lift a hand for you. Do you understand?"

I bowed.

"When your mission is ended, you will push into Scotland, and cross at once to Germany. You will give me your word of honor not to appeal to me or to implicate me in any way, at any time, or under any circumstances in the future."

I bowed again.

"Lady Edith Douglass is one of the ladies in waiting to the queen. One very high in power at the court has been making foul love to her for some time. She is not complaisant, and has twice tried to escape, but has hitherto failed, as she is closely watched.* Make your plan, and get her away to her father's home.

"If you care for your life, lose no time on the road, for you will be hotly pursued. Her lover is——" He whispered two words that left me staring aghast.

"But——"

"But nothing," he broke in rudely. "Are you not a man with a brain to think and an arm to fight as good as his?" Then, seeing me look still doubtful, he called out contemptuously. "Are you afraid, man? Shall I have to hang you, after all?"

"No, I am not afraid. If it were any one else——"

"Bah, man! Who would rise must take his chance."

"And I take mine," I cried proudly, throwing away my caution.

"That is better." He sat down at a table and wrote; then, taking up a purse, he handed it to me with what he had written.

"Here are some directions. You will read them over carefully and then burn the paper. In this purse is money sufficient for your needs. Be bold, and trust no man. If you fail me, your life is forfeit."

"But I can get no admission to the court. I am not a knight. Shall I go in attendance on you?"

"That is sooth," he said musingly. "Let me think. Ah! I have it. Kneel down." Taking up his sword and touching me lightly with it on the shoulder, he continued: "In the name and authority of our sovereign, Edward the Fourth, I dub thee knight. Be brave and loyal and fortunate. Arise, Sir Eustace Blount."

He handed me a blue scarf. "She will be expecting some one. Wear this, that she may know you."

CHAPTER II.—HIS MAJESTY THE KING.

I CONFESS that when I came in sight of the grim tower of London, which was at that time the residence of two kings—of the monastic Henry Sixth, who was kept a close prisoner, being confined to one room, and of the gallant young Edward Fourth, who had snatched the crown from hands too feeble to hold it—no spur less strong than the one which impelled me would have induced me to an undertaking so desperate as that in which I was engaged. .

The tower looked so cold and so formidable, so unwilling to give up that within its grasp, withal so unchancy, that a superstitious fear seized me, and I had half a mind to give orders to my boatman to turn back. But, taking my courage in my teeth, I gave my name to the seneschal, and was conducted to the audience hall.

Now, I am, if not a handsome man, at least a striking one, from my extraordinary size and vigor. I had decked myself in a new and rich costume, the blue scarf crossing my slashed doublet and being thrown over my left shoulder. So that when I entered the hall, and nods and whispers passed to and fro, when a hundred eyes fell to scanning me and leisurely examining me with cool, critical glances, I must needs take to blushing.

If I had moved forward from the door, my embarrassment would have been merely momentary; but I stood there like a stick or an awkward boy, not knowing what to do. When at length I did move away, feeling the amused eyes still glued to me, and being in a very agony of shyness, I stumbled headlong over my sword at the very feet of one of these laughing dames, making a great tear in the train of her dress.

When I arose, stammering apologies, she favored me with a cold stare, and turned abruptly from me. A titter ran over the hall. At that moment the Earl of Warwick and his hangman would have been welcome.

The entrance of a great noble with his following naturally drew attention from me, and gave me a chance to recover my composure. In the midst of the bustle and confusion and the crowding aside to make room for the newcomers a hand touched mine, and a piece of paper was slipped into my hand. I looked around, but could not find who had given it to me. Clearly, whoever it was, did not want to be observed.

I slipped behind a pillar and opened the paper. On it I read these words: "Make all preparations today. Be in readiness at the east gate tonight at eight o'clock to take my page to your rooms, where he will give you instructions. Wear the blue scarf."

The note was not signed. It needed no signature. I watched my chance and slipped quietly out of the hall without being observed. I made my way to the steps by the river where my boatman was, and returned to my rooms. I had already arranged with three men whom I knew to be both faithful and stout hearted to accompany me on the trip.

They were men who during the wars had been able easily to maintain

themselves as soldiers of fortune, but on the coming of peace they had gradually sunk in circumstances until they had been forced to part even with their horses. They were willing to engage in any undertaking, no matter how desperate, which would recoup their fallen fortunes.

The evening fell cold and drizzling. There was a penetrating dampness in the atmosphere that chilled to the bone, but long before the appointed time I was at my post with two horses waiting for the page. It still lacked some minutes of the hour when a boy of about fifteen, carrying a bundle, passed me slowly in the darkness, eying me closely.

"What look you for?" I asked him.

"For a man who wears a blue scarf," he answered, coming closer.

"Jump on," I said. We galloped through the darkness to my lodgings.

"Well, what is your message?" I asked, after I had locked and bolted the door and stirred the fire into a blaze.

"Good man, I must be alone for five minutes."

"Don't 'good man' me," I said angrily. "My name is Sir Eustace Blount."

"I beg your worshipful pardon, Sir Eustace Blount," he began mockingly.

"My lad," I said tartly, "if you want to become acquainted with the flat of my sword, you have begun the right way."

"Sir," he said, with a sudden respect in his voice, "will you give me five minutes alone in that room?"

The request seemed a foolish one, but I granted it, first making sure he could not escape. If a boy had been at court all his life, and had been humored and made a fool of, I supposed the easiest way to get at what he knew was to humor him. But I made up my mind to stand no more of it.

In a few minutes the door opened, and I stood staring, goggle eyed and open mouthed. In place of the page there stood a beautiful young lady.

She stood at the door curtsying and laughing. When she saw the sword on the table, she asked, "Is that to flog me with, sirrah?"

I had been trying to remember where I had seen her before. Of a sudden I recollected. She was the victim of my awkwardness at court, the young lady whose dress I had torn. I could only murmur, "Where is the page?"

"At your service, sir," she said, curtsying again; then, with a sudden sharpness, "But we waste time. Is everything ready for the start?"

"Everything. The men and horses are at a tavern not an arrow's fall from here. Will you ride tonight?"

"Yes, yes, at once. Oh, help me reach my father, good sir, and you shall name your own reward." Her voice had a tremulous appeal in it.

I did not know what to say, so I roughly bade her bolt and lock the door after me, while I brought my man.

The watchman was calling the ninth hour as we galloped away.

Soon we drew out of London into the open country. The storm had driven past, and the moon was shining out between the clouds.

Day was just breaking when we drew up at the St. Albans tavern.

"You will give us breakfast at once. The lady and I eat together. Afterward we shall want three rooms," I said to the landlord.

By noon we were on the road again, traveling toward Bedford. We were making better time now, but no pace was rapid enough to drive away the terrible anxiety which was gnawing me.

At any moment the pursuers might be upon us, bearing death for me and for her—worse. I suppose something of this fear showed in my face, for the girl asked me suddenly, "Are you afraid?"

"Yes," I said.

"Humph! You are big enough not to be."

After that we rode on in silence. She grew nervous and broke out with, "Good heavens, man, have you no tongue? Say something."

The truth is that the little lady, with her knowledge of the great world, her pride, and her glib tongue, awed me. I found nothing to say to her, and hated myself for my awkwardness.

"Sooth, sir, you are not nearly so impetuous as the first time I met you. I have had eager lovers, but never one that threw himself at my feet like you."

Late that night we crossed the bridge into Bedford, but, tired as we were, I judged it not safe to stay there, but turned into the Rugby road. After that night we went by easier stages, for I knew the pursuit had passed us, following the main road. I knew the country well about here.

The weather was perfect. It had all the charm of the early spring usual with midland England, and we had just come from the fog and grime of London.

The birds were nesting, and they sang of love. The leaves whispered it, and the buds murmured it. For this girl beside me, with her girlish whims and her womanly tenderness, I soon conceived a great love.

One day I learned how unwise it was. She began to tell me of a man of the same name as mine, famous as a quarreling ruffian in the middle counties; and told in particular of one affair he had had which had cost the life of a boy and the honor of a girl. Catching sight of my face, grown suddenly white, she stopped and cried: "The saints forgive me! He is a relative of yours. Indeed, I did not know. It is not your fault he is vile. Forgive me."

I turned from white to red and blurted out, "I am the man."

"What, you? But no—you are a gentleman."

"My father was Sir Eustace Blount of Tremont Hall."

"I do not care what your father was," she said coldly. "The point is, what are you?"

"The story is not so bad as you have said," I stammered.

But she turned away from me and would have no word to say.

All that day and the next I waited on her patiently, but got no word but barest thanks. I could read in her every movement that she hated me.

* * * * *

I heard the galloping horses behind us, drawing nearer. Presently two knights came in sight. One was very tall and well built, clad from head to foot in rich black armor, riding his horse like a centaur. The other was of slighter build and shorter. He was in a blue surtout richly embroidered.

Seeing us, the taller knight gave a shout and spurred toward us. Two of my men I bade stay back with the Lady Edith, while I and the third—a stout

fellow, by name Almayne—advanced to meet them. I picked as my opponent the taller of the two. Never before had I faced so keen a fighter.

In and out the long blades flashed, circling round and round in gleaming curves of light, crossing, grinding, slipping—thrust and parry and long sweep following each other in rapid succession. So swift the swords moved the eye could not follow them.

The man seemed made of steel, and he fought with a rush and eagerness there was no resisting. Faith, I had met my match—and more; but I reached him once, at least, on the hand, my sword biting through his gauntlet till the blood streamed forth. It did not stop him for a moment. Fiercer and more reckless, he drove his horse on mine, and strove to beat me down.

Blow on blow rained on my mail and casque. I gave ground, and as I did so my horse rushed off his feet, stumbled and fell. At the same moment a sharp pain shot through my shoulder. He had wounded me at the joint of my arm rerebrace and the shoulder piece. I flung myself from my horse as he went down and had the good luck to win clear of it.

But I had lost my sword, and as he spurred his horse on me could only spring aside and duck from the swinging blow. I took shelter behind my fallen horse, there recovering my sword. Again he charged at me, and again I parried and ducked.

My men, who had hitherto remained passive spectators of the scene, moved forward into action. Roberts rode forward to meet the black knight, while the other dismounted from his horse and assisted me to mount. While my foot was still in the saddle and before I had yet mounted the knight had cut through Roberts' guard, through his leather cap, and deep into his head. He dropped from his horse without a groan.

Yet the fight was over, and we had won. The knight in blue suddenly reeled in his saddle, dropped his sword, and fell forward on his horse's neck. My good Almayne had wounded him in the side and saved the day.

The other knight rode to his relief, crying out, his voice sounding hollow through the closed visor: "Begone, base churls! Begone! You have done that which all your lives could not atone." But I had not had the best of it, and my blood was up; so I would not have it so.

"Nay, my lord, I am going to know who you are that molest travelers on the king's highway." And I called on my men to stand by me.

"Begone, I say," he cried harshly. "You know not what you do, fool."

"Perhaps not, but you wanted this fight. Well, you shall have it. On guard," I cried doggedly.

"As you will man, but you have chosen death."

One of my men touched me on the shoulder. "The lady would speak with you," he said.

"I cannot speak with her now. She must wait," I cried pettishly.

"Nay, but she will not. She says it is as a matter of life and death."

"So is this," I said shortly, turning from him. But it seemed the fates had decreed against me. The girl herself had ridden out.

"I must see you a moment, sir," she said timidly, her eyes on the ground. "I must—it is necessary."

I moved aside with her a few paces.

"It is the king," she said briefly.

"The king? It is impossible," I cried in amazement.

"No, not impossible, but true. I know it."

"But how do you know it?"

"It does not matter," she said, stamping impatiently with her little foot; "I know it."

CHAPTER III.—THE LOVE OF A MAID.

A DOZEN suspicious circumstances flashed to my mind. His size and strength! How many men in England could have beaten me from my horse? Not many. Warwick or the king might do it, but I knew no other.

The richness of his armor, the deference paid him by his companion, who yet was plainly of high rank, his readiness to drop the matter before he should be discovered, above all his lofty manner and bearing, pointed to the same conclusion that the girl had reached.

Besides all this, it was in keeping with the king's character. Reckless and passionate, he was the very man to engage in an adventure of this kind.

"And if it is the king?" I asked.

"We must get away at once."

She was right again. I turned back to our late enemies. The wounded man was sitting erect on his horse, though the blood was dyeing his doublet scarlet. Almayne was facing him on guard.

"You agree to let us leave the field in peace?" I asked.

The leader bowed, stooped down and picked up his comrade's sword, then wheeled his horse. A moment later they were clattering down the road.

I walked over to Roberts and stooped to see if I could do aught for him. But it was no use. The poor fellow had gone to his last account. As I tried to rise I felt a curious lightness in my head and a singing in my ears, and tumbled over beside him.

When I came to myself our little lady was bathing the wound in my shoulder. Her golden hair mingled with mine, her rose red lips and blue eyes, grown tender and grave, were not a foot from mine.

"My good Almont, bring fresh water in your cap, and do you Almayne go tie the horses, that they stray not too far," she said.

And after they had gone she picked up a woman's glove that had fallen from my breast. She smiled, thinking she knew the glove. From it a paper fell—the note she had once given me. On the other side of the paper I had written these words:

Surely my lover is she,
Like unto her is there none;
Dearer than life unto me,
Sweetheart and tyrant in one.

She blushed a rosy red, and, thinking me yet unconscious, stooped down, and, pushing back the hair from my forehead, kissed me on the brow. Then,

as if naught had happened, this strange maid of sentiment and sense, went on dressing my wound.

From this time she was all kindness—kinder for the unkindness of the days before. At times she looked at me so shyly—this gay maiden—I could not understand her. But who can understand the ways of a woman?

In time we came to the last mile of our journey. All day she had been silent and fretful, which I thought strange, since we were reaching safety. She would tease me for a time, rallying me on my graveness, calling me Sir Doleful, and condoling with me for having to be a squire of maids.

We were passing through the woods which led to her home. Our attendants were some distance ahead and dusk was falling. We had been silent for a time. My heart was sore because I must soon leave her.

Gambler and rake as I had been—and as she had told me I had been—I had yet stood close to her in the week that was passed. She had been gracious and kind at times. Now I had served my use like an old shoe, and would be thrown aside.

"What dream you of, Sir Doleful? You are forever dreaming." Then laughing, she added, "Art of a poetic turn of mind?"

"No," I said gravely. I had no heart for raillery.

"What, have you never written poetry?"

"No. I have never."

"Or verse?" she persisted.

"None worth mentioning."

"To maidens?"

"No."

"To a maid, then? Why do you turn your head aside?"

I turned on her in anger that she should ridicule my love for her. "Perhaps I have," I said.

She clapped her hands softly, saying, "I thought so."

I looked her full in the face. "Why did you think so?"

"Oh, I don't know," she stammered. "I thought—perhaps——"

"I think, indeed, you knew," I said.

"How could I know?" she asked, drawing herself up haughtily.

"Because you have seen the only verse I have ever written."

"Seen it?" she echoed. Then she knew that I must know—well, what I knew. She turned a flaming red, and cried, "I hate you!"

I did not answer, but rode on in silence 'ill, through the falling darkness, I thought I heard a sob. Quietly I slipped off my horse, and, throwing the rein over my arm, stood at her stirrup.

"What—is it—now, sir?" she said, crushing down a sob.

"I am going to tell you something. It is nothing to you, but a great deal to me. You have told me that I am only a common bully and bravo. It is true, I am only that. I am—or, rather, I have been, for I will be no longer—a rake and a gambler, living from hand to mouth. Nay, I am worse.

"The Earl of Warwick held my life in his hands for killing his man. He spared me on condition that I would undertake this task. All this week I have been working, not for you, but for my wretched neck. But I have

learned to know one good woman—the only one that I have known in years—one brave in utmost peril, cheerful under difficulties, one loyal and true, and pure, and I love her. Yes, I love you. I have no right to say it, but it is true—ruffian as I am—as you have said I am——”

“If I said that, it is not true,” she sobbed. “I did not know you then.”

“Oh, I am a man with a price on my head, a hunted outlaw——”

“For whose sake?” she asked softly, still through her tears.

“But I am a better man for having known you. I do not hope to gain your love. You are as far above me, God knows, as are the stars. Before I knew you I thought myself a gentleman. You have taught me better now. I am——”

“A gallant gentleman, who has dared a king’s wrath—the only one in all his court who would do it—to save a friendless girl. Between what you were and what I am there may have been a barrier, but you have wiped it out. You are my own true knight.”

In her eyes was a radiance I had never before seen on woman’s face.

What I did then does not matter, and you have no right to know. It is between her and me. I had faced death often, but I had never been so moved. The words of a girl, speaking out of her purity and love, had swept away the hardness and selfishness which had been gathering in my heart for years.

An hour later we reached her father’s house.

CHAPTER IV.—THE ROYAL INSIGNIA.

WHEN I left Lady Edith Douglass at her home, and turned my horse’s head northward, my heart was exceeding sad, for, though she had confessed that she loved me, and her father had favored my suit, which was more than I had dared to hope, yet I was leaving her for an indeterminate time, to go into parts unknown. The best that I could hope for was long years of exile.

I had braved a king’s anger, had touched him in his most vulnerable spot, having come between him and the woman he desired. If the king had been a just or a weak man, there might have been some hope of pardon. But he was neither. He was a passionate, vindictive, relentless man—one who never forgot or forgave an injury. The wound in the hand which I had given him he might pardon readily enough, but the wound to his pride—never. If I ever came within his reach he would destroy me.

The stimulus which had sustained me hitherto—the caring for and saving my love—was gone, and with it were gone all the hope and gladness that had been mine. I was now merely a penniless, broken fugitive from justice, no longer inspired by a great task lying before me.

So, though the birds sang as merrily and the flowers nodded as gaily in the wind, there was no joy in them for me. Such a difference does a woman’s smile make to a man.

I pass over the itinerary of my journey, it being tiresome and in nowise necessary to the reader. ’Twas the evening of the second day that I drew up to an inn where my adventures began.

Two gentlemen were sitting at a small table in a corner far from the fire. I bowed to them, and they answered the salutation. Then, being tired and stiff with riding, I flung myself into a chair near the fire. I could see them whispering together and nodding at me, one of them urging something at which the other seemed to demur. But the heat of the fire made me drowsy and in a few minutes I began to doze.

I was awakened by a tap on the shoulder. One of the gentlemen stood before me.

"From whence, sir?" he asked civilly enough.

"From the south," I said.

"To where?"

"The north."

"For what?"

"On the king's business," I said coldly. I fully expected him to call out my name and demand my surrender, but at my last answer his face lighted up and he shook hands with me cordially.

"I am Harry Maile. This gentleman is Sir Robert Foulke. I am afraid we have cleared the larder. Will you not join us?"

I hesitated. Whoever they were, they were not what I had thought them. Why not disarm suspicion by joining them? A smoking roast brought in to their table decided me.

"With pleasure. My name is Egbert Ghent."

They were pleasant gentlemen, bluff and hearty in appearance, but it seemed to me there was a certain repressed excitement about them, an air of secrecy covered by an apparent frankness that puzzled me and at the same time put me on my guard. I resolved to test them.

"You will excuse me for a moment, gentlemen, but it is my custom when I travel to see that my horse is fed before I eat."

So saying I left the room. Once outside the house, I whipped round the corner and stepped softly up to a side window. I had half expected to see one of them at the door watching to see if I were attempting to escape. Nothing of the kind. It was evident they had no suspicion of me.

I reëntered the house and joined them. After dinner one of them pulled out an old pack of cards, and we were soon busy at *écarté*. They were mere children at the game and I won their money as I pleased; but they were keen to play, and after their money was gone they put up their pistols, their horses, and at last their swords. I won them all.

They looked sullenly at the table, while I shuffled and cut and reshuffled the cards. I knew they were in a quarrelsome mood.

"It's cursed ill luck," grumbled Vaile.

"Coming just now," said the other.

"The more fools we."

"How the deuce are we to reach Beaumont tomorrow night? It's a long forty miles from here," growled Sir Robert.

"Come, gentlemen," I said. "I played for sport. Your swords and your pistols I cannot use. I return them to you. Your horses you shall redeem."

"But how? Faith, you have skinned us like eels. We have no more money with us."

"Give me your notes. It is a debt of honor, and good."

And so it was arranged. I left them still drinking, and went up to my room, for I was tired out. Hours later I was awakened by the noise they made as they passed my door on the way to their rooms. I recognized the voice of Sir Robert singing the chorus of an old song of the War of the Roses—

My love she wears the Red Rose,
It blossoms on her cheeks,
No puling, sickly white flower—

Then he broke off. "God's death, Harry, join in. When you aren't drunk you make noise enough. Art never sober except when art drunk—ha, ha!" And his loud laugh rang down the passage as they stumbled into their room.

I was awakened by the sun shining on my face through the window. I stretched, yawned, got up, dressed, and made my way down stairs. I ordered breakfast, and while I was still waiting for it, my two acquaintances of the night before descended the stairs.

It developed that they were going north—to a hunter's meet, one of them told me with a wink. We traveled together, and by sunset had covered the forty miles which lay between us and Beaumont. On the way we overtook several riders, all bound for the same place—Beaumont.

One of these was a man quite out of the ordinary. He was a very tall, cadaverous man with a thin lantern jawed face. He was a scholar, airing his learning at every chance. He laughed frequently, but never with his eyes. These were invariably cold and steely, giving me a singular distrust of the man, which I afterward found justified. He was introduced to me as Sir Anthony Silliman.

Beaumont is a large, rambling house, which had formerly belonged to a gentleman who had been killed, with his only son, at the battle of Towton. The house had fallen into disrepair since that time, the eastern wing having been burned during the wars. For the past year the building had been used as an inn by an old servant of the family.

As we entered the house a man touched my arm and asked respectfully, "From where?"

"From the south."

"To where?"

"To the north."

"On what business?"

I was about to tell the man to mind his own affairs, when Sir Robert broke in.

"On the king's. He's all right, Jack. Damme, he's a friend of mine!"

Now, this made me uneasy. Why had I been asked these questions twice?

Why had Sir Robert found it necessary to answer for me? During the day I had heard mysterious hints dropped that I did not understand, and yet plainly these men thought me to be on the same business as themselves. But what was their business? The idea of a hunting party was ridiculous.

Sir Robert had not come seventy five miles to go hunting, for he lived in the heart of the best hunting country in England. There was something deeper than that in it. If I could have found a good excuse for leaving, I would have done so, but none occurred to me.

In the diningroom were a dozen gentlemen, and one who looked to be a yeoman. They were already eating, and with no ill will we joined them. I looked up the table, and as I did so, started. One of the men I knew. His name was James Somers. He was a fierce hater of the Yorkists, and was, I had heard, in France. I knew the king had set a price upon his head. He looked surprised when he saw me, but bowed pleasantly.

As for me, I wished myself anywhere else, for I had stumbled by accident on a meeting of Lancastrian plotters. I sat with burning face listening to the talk, which was growing plainer as the wine loosened their tongues.

King Edward had offended the nobles by marrying a plain gentleman's widow and exalting her family to the highest rank. The pride of the Woodvilles had grown beyond bearing. He had ground down the people with unjust taxes, and of late had even alienated the Londoners by his harshness.

The whole country was ripe for a rising. Edward of York would fly without striking a blow. There was to be a simultaneous uprising in the northern and middle counties. James Somers promised two thousand men at arms from the French king. So the talk ran.

Suddenly there was a pushing back of chairs, and James Somers rose to his feet. He stood, wine glass in hand, with drawn sword, waiting for silence.

"'Tis time we got down to business, gentlemen. But first I have a toast to propose," he cried. "It is a toast you will all drink gladly. 'Tis a toast should be drunk with drawn swords—some day I shall drink it, my blade dripping with blood. It is—death to the traitor, Edward of York."

They sprang to their feet and drew their swords with a ringing cheer. I alone sat unmoved. What I feared had come to pass. They waited for me a moment. Then Sir Robert Foulke touched me with his sword.

"We wait, Mr. Ghent."

I turned in my chair. "I cannot drink that toast, Sir Robert."

"Not drink it. But—*mort Dieu*, you shall drink it! Why not?"

"I cannot—that is all."

Somers cut in sharply. "What did you call the gentleman, Sir Robert?"

"Mr. Ghent—Egbert Ghent."

"Did he tell you that was his name?"

"Yes."

"Then, gentlemen, we are betrayed. He is a spy. His name is Eustace Blount—Blount, the duelist."

I think until that moment this had not occurred to them. Such a fierce, wild cry I hope never to hear again. A dozen swords were at my throat in an instant. If I had moved an inch or winked an eyelash, they would have killed me where I sat. The next moment Sir Robert beat the swords down.

"It is not true," he cried.

"It is true. He has not denied it. He dies." It was the voice of Sir Anthony Silliman, and his cold eyes glittered balefully.

"He does not die without a hearing. Or, will you discuss it with me, Sir Anthony?" flashed back Sir Robert. "I should be much pleased if you would so far honor me." But Silliman fell back blankly at this.

"Yet he has not denied it," said Somers coldly.

"Come, man, speak up," called Vaile impatiently.

"My name is Blount, but I am no spy."

"Swear him. Swear him," cried Vaile, eager to save me.

"I have it," said another, the yeoman—whom from his talk I had gathered to be a leader of the common people in the midland counties, a sort of Wat Tyler. "Swear him on the relics at the priory. 'Tis scarce a mile distant, and there is a finger joint of the blessed St. Peter, and a toenail of St. Andrew." The suggestion was adopted, and the yeoman was sent for them.

Meanwhile an ominous calm succeeded the storm. I met lowering glances from all sides, save Foulke and Vaile. Sir Robert was walking up and down humming:

My love she wears the Red Rose,
It blossoms on her cheeks,
No puling, sickly white flower,
But crimson strong and deep.

He stopped suddenly, slapping his thigh. "By our Lady, spy or no spy, he shall not die. We owe him twenty pounds apiece—a debt of honor."

"That is sooth, and it must be paid," cried Vaile.

"What is that to us," said Sir Anthony.

"It is a good deal to me," answered Vaile hotly. "He is my creditor—it is a gaming debt, and I will be no party to his killing while I am in his debt."

"Well, you need not be a party. We will see to it."

"Nor will I permit it."

"'Twill be no such quibble as that will save him. I have a mind to lend you the money to pay him," cried another, Beverley by name, a man with fierce, reckless eyes. And he did. The money was handed me. I bowed, remarking, "I hope I may live to enjoy it."

"We must all die," sighed Sir Anthony. "Even spies."

"Yet you are an old man. How have you managed it?"

"How came it that you gave a false name?" asked Somers abruptly.

"There are warrants out for my arrest. I am flying to Scotland. I thought the gentlemen were king's spies."

"Bah! Are you going to swallow any cock and bull story he chooses to tell," sneered Silliman.

"What does it matter? Spy or no spy, he holds all our lives in his hand. What's to prevent his going to the king and blabbing?" asked Beverley.

"Dead men tell no tales," said Silliman significantly.

"We might take him to Scotland," said another.

"And how? Are we king's officers?" cried Beverley scornfully.

"We talk like children. Unless we destroy that man our plot is blown upon. We would not dare act for fear he had told. What is one life—and a spy's?" snarled Silliman.

"You know him, Somers. What is his reputation?"

"He is a gambler, but he has the reputation of being honest."

"Reputation? I trust my life to no man's reputation," cried Beverley.

"Yet you trust it to mine, and I trust mine to yours," said Vaile.

Lounging in my chair, I was to all appearances the coolest man in the room, the least concerned, the most indifferent.

Yet it may be surmised that I had noticed every speaker, watching the effect of his words closely. As I weighed the probabilities, I believed I would yet escape. Two or three of the quieter ones were veering round to my side, and Vaile and Foulke were stanch.

The man who had been sent for the sacred relics returned, carrying a box which contained them. He placed it on the table. The abbot himself had accompanied him to the door, fearing to lose sight of the abbey's most precious possession.

I stepped forward and placed my right hand upon the box. They formed a ring of flashing steel around me. Somers dictated the oath.

"I, Eustace Blount, gentleman——"

"I, Eustace Blount, gentleman——"

"Do swear, by my sacred honor and upon these relics of the saints——"

"Do swear, by my sacred honor and upon these relics of the saints——"

"By all my hopes of heaven and fears of hell——"

"By all——"

"Stop!" Sir Anthony was pointing with his long forefinger at my hand. "The perjured villain wears the king's ring."

And, as I live, it was true.

CHAPTER V.—TO BALK THE PLOT.

I MUST go back a moment and tell how it chanced that I had the ring. When Lady Edith Douglass, disguised as a page, escaped from the tower, it had been by means of a ring bearing the king's monogram and signet—a ring which he had given her in a moment of folly.

That ring she had given to me, thinking it might facilitate my escape. This very morning I had found a small hole in my pocket, and, fearing lest the ring be lost, I had slipped it on my finger.

And this man had seen it in time for my undoing, for I was face to face with death again. There was no violent outburst—only a dead silence. In that silence I knew I was condemned.

"If I were a king's spy, would I write it on my hand for all to read?" I asked scornfully.

"But the ring is there," said Sir Robert gravely.

"Yes, it is there; but I did not get it from the king."

"Where did you get it?"

"I got it—no, I cannot tell. But, as God lives, I am no spy."

"He lies. He is a spy," said Silliman exultingly. "He travels with us all day under a false name, hears these matters talked about, but makes no sign. He makes his way into the house and is discovered. Would you have

more evidence? Well, it is here. He wears the Yorkist usurper's ring on his hand and cannot tell how it came there."

"You are a wise man, Sir Anthony," I sneered; "but has it not occurred to you that if I were what you say, I would have drunk the toast? Nor would I have been wearing his ring. These things are proofs of my innocence."

"You must die. Too many lives hang on this. You may be false as Judas for all we know. But when? And how?" asked Somers.

"No time like the present," said Beverley cheerfully. I thought he would not have been in such a hurry if it had been he. Meanwhile I leaned against the mantel and waited. Different ways were suggested for getting rid of me. At last, smilingly, I volunteered a suggestion.

"If I understand the situation, I am, gentlemen, unfortunately, a disturbing element to your harmony. Am I right?"

"You appreciate the situation perfectly," said Beverley, with a grin.

"That being the case," I continued, "I cut the Gordian knot. You do not want me to escape. You do not want to murder me. I am at one with you about the last. Let me fight you one after another till I fall."

"And who fights you first, according to your plan?" asked one.

I shrugged my shoulders. "All one to me. You might begin with the oldest," I said, bowing to Sir Anthony.

"I will have none of it," he cried hastily. "Why should a gentleman sacrifice himself in the matter?"

"Why, indeed? It was to save one I suggested you. All men must die, you know." I am afraid I laughed; I know Beverley did. "Or you might draw lots," I said carelessly.

Half a dozen cried out that they were willing.

"But I am not," said Sir Anthony.

"Nor I," said Somers unexpectedly. "I do not need to prove my courage. I have fought on a dozen fields. But whoever goes up against Blount is a dead man—and my king needs me."

"Then you prefer to murder me?" I said.

"No, it will not be murder," said Sir Robert gravely. "I do not believe you are a spy. You do not look like one. But many lives hang on this, and if the majority decide you must die, they have a right to kill you. Canst not tell where you got the ring?"

I shook my head. "I cannot in honor tell."

"Then your fate must be left to a vote." Sir Robert pulled out his pack of cards and dealt one red and one black card to each man.

"Let each man drop one card in the helmet. Red means life and black means death. There are fifteen of us. Eight decides. Art agreed?"

Each man made some sign of assent. He turned to me.

"You are too considerate," I said. "Does the butcher ask the heifer if she is willing? Begin."

There was a moment's pause. Then Beverley walked forward and tossed in the ace of spades, crying gaily, "*Rouge et noir*, gentlemen. Black wins."

Sir Robert followed and dropped in a red card, so that all might see. So also Vaile. Then Sir Anthony slunk forward and dropped in a card, face

down. One by one the rest followed. The cards were counted. The count stood, black eleven, red four. I had lost.

I hung in the wind a moment, then turned to Sir Robert.

"Take a fool's advice. I could not save my neck, but I can save yours. When you hang me hang him with me"—pointing to Sir Anthony—"and you'll hang a traitor."

I was taken into the west wing and put into an unoccupied room. I had asked for writing material, which they left me. The windows were strongly barred, and the door was locked and bolted from the outside.

I tried the bars of the windows, but they were sound. I examined the floor carefully, foot by foot, but there was no trap door. Of that I was sure, for I spent an hour on it. They had given me three hours. Then I tried the walls, tapping with the hilt of my dagger; my sword they had taken from me.

I had to work carefully that the man in the passage might not hear. In time I came to a large portrait hanging on the wall. At the first tap it sounded hollow. I could scarce believe my luck. I tried again. Yes. It was a panel door. I sought everywhere for the spring. At last I found it.

On the paper they had given me I wrote:

Pray excuse me for my hurried departure, as I have an engagement with the king, which cannot be postponed. I give you my word I shall mention no names.

Regretfully,

SIR EUSTACE BLOUNT.

Nota Bene.—

As live men tell tales, I think you had better postpone the little uprising.

I stepped into the passage and closed the panel tightly behind me. Then quietly I made my way along the passage, which was not more than eighteen inches wide. It was as dark as Egypt. At the end of the passage was a closed door. It opened outward. I slipped through and—went headlong down into space. I got a fearful shaking, but by great good fortune landed on my feet. I waited a moment, listening for sounds of alarm.

Hearing none, I stepped forward more cautiously. I was now in an underground passage. The roofing of the passage at this point was a flat stone. I exerted all my strength and moved it a hair's breadth. A shower of dust poured down on me, but I kept at it, using my dagger for a lever, till I had moved it about a foot.

Somehow I struggled through and found myself in the stable. There was a lantern lying there. I carried it with me from stall to stall till I found a fresh horse, which I saddled and led out of the stable. For a couple of hundred paces I led him, then I mounted and rode as fast as I could push him.

I was fifty miles nearer London than Beaumont is when I heard the sound of a horse in front of me. The rider heard me, for he quickened his pace.

Being curious to know who it was out at three o'clock in the morning, I galloped forward. The man in front of me was spurring his horse mercilessly, but the poor beast could do no better. We raced down the road. In ten minutes I had overhauled him.

The face that turned to look at me was Sir Anthony Silliman's—a face

ghastly with fear. When he saw who I was he ripped out an oath of surprise and alarm.

"You," he said. "You—I thought——"

He did not finish. I gave a whoop of joy.

"You thought I was dead by this time. Well, I am not. You will be delighted to hear that I am on my way to tell the king of a little hunting meet in the north. May I ask where you are going?" I was in gay spirits.

"I am—taking a ride."

I laughed. "So I see. For your health?"

"To meet—a friend."

"Ah. I think I heard you name him last night. Edward of York, I think, but when you meet him you had better assume he is the king."

The man turned yellow. I read abject fear in his shifty eyes. I had the traitor on the hip, and I promise you I made him sweat.

"If I see him first, I'll tell him you are coming. Perhaps he will send some one to meet you," I said.

The man's face was twitching, but I had no pity.

"Oh, I understand you, Sir Anthony Silliman. You thought I was a king's spy, and you would have killed me to get the reward yourself. You are on your way now to destroy brave men who have trusted you. Faugh!

"You have the soul of a butcher and the heart of a hare. I am afraid your kinsman, the hangman, will find you a poor subject. Shall I tell you whom you expected to see instead of me a minute ago? One of those gentlemen whom you are selling."

"I am selling nobody," he said, scarcely able to speak.

"Well, no—you are not. But you thought you were. I shall beat you to London, your news will be stale, and when you get there the king will hang you. You will be the first fruit. Well, we must all die," I added.

The hoary villain writhed in his seat. "The king will need another witness," he said at last.

"He will take a minor actor—not Sir Anthony, who plotted against him before." The burden of the conversation seemed to rest on me.

"You are a classical scholar, Sir Anthony. Well, I was destined for a monk, but kicked the traces. You are between Scylla and Charybdis. You dare not go forward, and you dare not turn back. 'Tis a pretty dilemma. I wonder what you will do."

I got my answer on the instant. The man had been watching his chance. Suddenly he flashed his sword out, but before he could use it I closed with him, and drove my dagger through his heart.

I pinned a paper on his breast with these words written on it:

This is the body of a traitor. As he said last night, "Dead men tell no tales."

I knew the man who would find the body would understand.

This was the only notable incident that befell me on my way to London. The rest was merely hard travel day and night, snatching a few hours sleep when I could, then up and away. Thrice I changed horses, and once—when near London—was bade "Stand and deliver."

Haggard and weary and faint—for the continual riding had opened my wound and kept it raw—I reached London at last. I dared not rest an hour, but waited on the king at the tower, though splashed from head to foot with mud. The seneschal looked askance at me, but when I gave my business admitted me at once. I afterward found that the seneschal had mistaken me for a messenger who was expected, whom the king had left orders to admit at once. I had expected to meet the king alone, but round a long table were seated a score of men. At the far end was the king, and on either side of the table were the principal lords of the kingdom. Warwick I recognized, and Montagu and Rivers and Hastings. The rest I did not know.

"What does this mean?" the king cried, half rising from his seat. I noticed his right hand was bandaged.

"News, sire," I said, dropping on one knee.

"Has every messenger got to come blundering into our presence? Who are you?"

"Eustace Blount, sire, with news of a rising in the north."

"Eustace Blount? Who captured you?"

"Nobody, sire. I came with tidings of a Lancastrian rising."

"Then, you are a fool. For you shall hang within the hour."

He tapped a bell, and when the doorkeeper appeared, gave orders to send a file of soldiers. My Lord Hastings leaned forward and whispered something.

"Pest on the news!" answered the king. "He brings no news. It is a trick." But Hastings whispered again with him. "Well, ask him," the king said impatiently.

Hastings turned to me and asked, "What news have you?"

I told him briefly all I had to tell, omitting names.

"Had they no names?" asked Rivers.

"They used false names."

"And did you know none of them?"

"One I knew—Sir Anthony Silliman. Him I killed in escaping."

When I entered the room Warwick had given a start; since then he had made no sign of knowing me. Now he spoke for the first time.

"Pest! The old fox would have made a fine witness."

"He followed me and tried to stop me. I had to kill him," I said.

"And Louis was to have given men?" asked the king.

"Two thousand, the man said, sire."

"What think you of that, Warwick?" the king cried triumphantly, turning to the earl.

"I think, sire, as I have always thought, that you had better make a friend of me. With Louis your friend the Lancastrians can do nothing," said Warwick gravely.

"Or tear his kingdom about his ears. I hate the superstitious fool. Shall we annex France, my lords?"

"Had we better not quiet England first?" asked Hastings.

"Right. Though I had rather set them a fighting Frenchmen than each other."